



## Governing the Hills

### Imperial Landscapes, National Territories and Production of Place between Naya Nepal and Incredible India!

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Governing the Hills  
Imperial Landscapes, National Territories and Production  
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*Incredible India!* has ostensibly stepped out of the “imaginary waiting room of history” and joined the ranks of modern, developed and branded nations. And *Naya Nepal* is moving towards a “federal, democratic, and republican” future. Concomitantly, a range of claims to local autonomy brings together local movements and global processes in novel ways. In fact, local place-making itself has been globalised.

This dissertation asks what happens when the increasingly globalised production of places collides with a resilient national order of things in the Himalayan hills. It investigates movements for the establishment of a Limbuwan and Gorkhaland state on either side of the border between eastern Nepal and north-eastern India. Through the engagement with this area, the dissertation argues that we need to rethink the spatiality of government in order to understand the contemporary conditions for government as well as local autonomy.

Across imperial landscapes, national territories and global place-making, the dissertation documents novel collisions between refashioned imperial differences and resilient national monopolies on political authority. It argues that these collisions bring out old problems as well as new opportunities in relation to the aspiration for a larger say in local decision-making: While global connections can provide normative leverage to demands for increased local autonomy, the consequence of global connectivity might also be new imperial arrangements of government at distance.

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PhD Dissertation  
Department of Political Science  
University of Copenhagen  
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#### **List of Words and Abbreviations**

- ABGL: Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (All India Gorkha League, AIGL)
- *Bikas*: Development
- *Bir*: Bravery
- DGHC: Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
- DICA: Department of Information and Cultural Affairs of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
- FLSC: Federal Limbuwan State Council
- GJM: Gorkha Janmukti Morcha
- GNLF: Gorkha National Liberation Front
- GTA: Gorkhaland Territorial Administration
- KYC: Kirat Yakthum Chumlung
- *Naya Nepal*: New Nepal
- NEFIN: Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
- NFDIN:
- ST: Scheduled Tribe

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past two decades, major changes have taken place in governmental paradigms and national self-representations across South Asia. A broad range of events, from Maoist insurgency and Hindu nationalism to constitution-writing and neoliberal economic policies are pushing the subcontinent through processes of internal and global refashioning. *Incredible India!* has ostensibly stepped out of the “imaginary waiting room of history” and joined the ranks of modern, developed and branded nations.<sup>1</sup> And *Naya Nepal* is no longer the world’s last Hindu kingdom, although the country’s transition towards a “federal, democratic, and republican” future is still rife with uncertainty.<sup>2</sup> Concomitantly with changes in governmental paradigms, a range of claims to local autonomy brings together local movements and global processes in novel ways. Place-making itself has been globalised. Local movements face global images of ‘their’ locality. State-encouraged commercial dynamics of tourism, heritage and geographical branding furthers a global sense of place that emphasises harmony over conflict. And groups claiming local roots themselves draw on international academic literature and globalised notions of indigeneity.

In this study, I ask what happens when the increasingly globalised production of places collide with a resilient national order of

things in the Himalayan hills.<sup>3</sup> Combining global connections with claims directed at the nation-state, contemporary movements for local autonomy provide an important site for such collisions. Here, I investigate movements for the establishment of a Limbuwan and Gorkhaland state on either side of the border between eastern Nepal and north-eastern India. My study is motivated by the aspirations for a larger say in local decisions that these movements fundamentally express – although, as I illustrate, these aspirations are often obscured and overrun by other interests. In this study, I thus ask about the contemporary conditions for government and local autonomy in the Himalayan hills. To unpack these conditions, I ask how government was first extended over these hills by imperial regimes. I then ask how this government changed with the national territorialisation of the subcontinent. And finally, I ask how these governmental legacies are played out in the contemporary politics of local autonomy. Through my analysis, I show how contemporary political dynamics reactualise resilient imperial differences and tensions within the nation that a national territorial perspective obscures. And I argue that the contemporary refashioning of these differences can shift decision-making both closer to and further away from the people inhabiting the borderland.

The hills, that form the centre of attention in the present study, are what most people from my flat part of the world would call mountains. A translation of the Nepali *pahad*, these hills are dwarfed only by the show clad *himal*, the massive peaks of the Himalayan range. Albeit, domesticated as “hills” by the British colonists and their hill stations, they in fact presents a rugged terrain that largely opposes

<sup>1</sup> The imaginary waiting room of history refers to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s famous phrase in *Provincializing Europe* (2000). For a recent analysis of the shifting logic of the India nation-state under the Incredible India! brand see (Kaur, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The imagination of Nepal as a “Federal Democratic Republic” is taken directly out of the current interim constitution. For descriptions of recent developments in relation to Nepal’s refashioning in this direction see e.g. (International Crisis Group, 2008, 2011; B. G. Shrestha, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> I take the notions of a ‘national order of things’ from (Malkki, 1992)

centralised government. I pose my questions from these hills neither to exoticise nor generalise the area they inhabit. What the hills provide my study, is rather a productive location from which to rethink notions of landscape, territory and government in the contemporary conjuncture. The ‘friction’ of the terrain and history of un-governability in these hills bring the spatial extension of government in to sharp relief. The situation of my area of study across the border between two contemporary nation states provides a good position to approach the production of national territory. And the contemporary movements for local autonomy combined with the global connections of indigeneity, heritage, tea and tourism make it a good location to observe shifts in the scalar hierarchies along which we often imagine the world.

Through my engagement with this area, I argue that we need to rethink notions of government and its spatiality in order to understand the contemporary conditions for government and local autonomy. Aspirations for local autonomy tend to be regarded in light of traditional hierarchies of scale. Here, the local is seen in relation to the national, and autonomy in relation to national territorial government. Movements for local autonomy are seen as national problems because localities are seen as encompassed by national scales.<sup>4</sup> However, the last couple of decades has seen increasing shifts in the connections between governmental authority and national territories. The Himalayan hills also reflect these shifts, and my study suggests that it is no longer sufficient simply to re-evaluate the authority attached to traditional scales. We need, I argue, to fundamentally rethink the

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<sup>4</sup> For a good discussion of the imagination of nation-states as ‘vertically encompassing’ see (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002)

connection between government and spatiality. Rather than asking whether national government is being undermined by various forces of globalisation, we need to ask how government, in a wider sense, continuously brings about spatial scales and hierarchies. And we need to ask what kind of shifts the spatiality of government is going through in the contemporary conjuncture.

The increasingly global production of place that feeds into and affects local movements today is part, I argue, to these shifts in the spatiality of government. Hence, while we need to look at ‘government’ in the present conjuncture to see how it frames claims to local autonomy, the investigation of such claims in turn tells us about the contemporary conditions of government. Local movements bring out a range of tensions within nation-states – tensions that were probably there all along, but which attain an increased urgency in the contemporary conjuncture. They bring out differences and spatial inequalities that national government often seeks to obscure in their self-fashioning for international competition. The global connectivity of local movement thus illustrate that it is no longer sufficient to see movements for autonomy through simple dichotomies of national government and local resistance. As I illustrate in this study, contemporary government evolves across a much more dispersed field. This, however, does not mean that there is no domination or resistance. If we see the aspiration for a larger say in local matters as the ultimate reference point, global connections can bring decisions both closer to and further away from this situation.

Furthermore, I argue that we need to historicise the contemporary moment and the spatiality of its government in order to understand the contemporary conditions for government and local autonomy. This, in



turn, brings into sharper relief the tensions that exist within the national territorial order. In this study, I engage such a project by investigating the tension between three historic assemblages of government and politics in the Himalayan hills: The *imperial landscapes* that emerged in the collision between the rugged nature of the hills and the interests and affect of British colonisers and Gorkha emperors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the *national territories* that the new Indian and Nepali governmental regimes sought to produce out of the imperial landscapes in the mid- and late twentieth century, and the *glocal place-making* that is currently taking place around labels such as Darjeeling, Gorkhaland and Limbuwan. I use the word assemblage to indicate a combination of material practices and governmental vision that is not necessarily confined to a specific geographical scale.<sup>5</sup> It points to various constellations of ways of knowing, seeing and acting that concomitantly enable government and constitute what government entails. In the study, I show how these assemblages rely on various ecological, territorial and anthropological differentiations and how each assemblage reworks differences inherited from earlier ones.

Although the three assemblages that I analyse in the present study emerge at different points in history, I argue that they are all three present, in various guises, in the contemporary politics of the Himalayan hills. Today they are situated in various positions of tension with each other in a repeated play of difference and uniformity. I argue

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense, my use of the term assemblage resembles the one proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. They suggest that an assemblage “is simultaneously and inseparably a machinic assemblage and an assemblage of enunciation”, that it “is basically territorial”, and that this territoriality “originates in a certain decoding of milieus” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 503-505). In my use, assemblage similarly denotes a combination of representation and practice that refers to a certain space or locality (I use territory in a more specific sense than Deleuze and Guattari) which is, however, not restricted to a specific scale.

that the national projects of territorialisation have only superficially erased a range of differences that relate to the imperial landscapes. Hence today, elements of empire within and across national boundaries are being reactualised in demands for recognition, statehood and local autonomy. These demands uncover imperial inequalities that the national territorial perspective obscures, while connecting them to global notions of branding, heritage, indigeneity and tourism. In the study, I document novel collisions between, on the one hand, refashioned imperial differences in the production of place and, on the other hand, resilient territorial monopolies on political authority at the national scale. I argue that these collisions bring out old problems as well as new opportunities in relation to the aspiration for a larger say in local decision-making: While global connections can provide normative leverage to demands for increased local autonomy, the consequence of global connectivity might also be new imperial arrangements of government at a distance.

### **The Path Towards the Present Study**

As many research projects do, this study started out in a very different place from where it arrived in the present dissertation. I began my research process with the aim of conducting a comparative study of the management of cultural pluralism and democratic experiences between six country cases: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. As a cross-country comparison, this envisaged study was situated well within the nationalised confines of traditional political science. It was natural to me that cases would equal nation-states, and thus to expect that the interesting points of comparison would be situated between (rather than within or across) these entities. Hence,

my initial project was very loyal to the national scale. It gradually fell apart.

First of all, I quickly realised that I would not be able to conduct a six-country comparison at the level of detail I was after within the scope of my PhD. This was a simple realisation, and the consequences were as simple – cut down the cases. Six quickly turned to three (India, Pakistan, Nepal) and later to two (India and Nepal). The more substantial re-structuring, however, only arrived later. When I began to take a more careful look at Indian and Nepali history and present politics, a cluster of (amazingly simple) realisations pushed me further away from the initial plans: the ‘management of pluralism’ I was looking for differed substantially within the two countries; the representations of identity that I saw as the building blocks of ‘pluralism’ included a host of mobile, cross-border histories and references; and the spatial scales of the ‘national’ and ‘local’ entities I was working with seemed somehow themselves to be at stake in the on-going politics. Over time, these complications themselves began to seem more interesting than the envisioned country comparison that they were obviously undermining. The complications became my object of study.

My changing interest gradually brought me into the methodological borderland of the political science discipline. The critical discussions of the field and place in the anthropological literature I engaged influenced and complicated my conceptualisation of cases.<sup>6</sup> In order to get a grasp of the political dynamics between

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<sup>6</sup> There is, by now, a host of literature on the how contemporary globalised conditions affect the possibilities of ethnographic fieldwork and anthropological inquiry. Good discussions can e.g. be found in (Arjun Appadurai, 1996; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997b, 1997c; Marcus, 1995).

national and local scales, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in two town schools and their surrounding semi-urban environments on either side of the India-Nepal border. My recognition of the ‘methodological territorialism’ characteristic of much research within my own discipline was further pushed by this fieldwork.<sup>7</sup> Doing research on the Limbuwan movement in Eastern Nepal – one of the most vocal ‘ethnic’ movements for more local autonomy at the time – it was hard not to look the additional thirty kilometres across the border to where the Gorkhaland movement had taken place in the late 80’s and was again beginning to stir. This cross-border perspective and readings on the borderland provided additional blows to my initial research design and its disciplinary conventions.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, moving between different geographical and textual sites of investigation, I realised that landscapes, place and scale itself seemed to be at stake in much of what I was working with. Representatives of the Limbuwan movement sought to make sense of and legitimise their claims on the basis of a representation of Limbuwan as a proper, historically rooted, indigenous place. The Gorkhaland movement, on the other hand, seemed to operate in a curiously unsettled space – somehow sliding between the spatial categorisations within which the governmental gaze of the Indian state organised its territory. Although both movements fundamentally revolve around aspirations for local autonomy, the politics that they are part of is concomitantly local, national, and global. In fact the

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<sup>7</sup> At least since John Agnew’s article on the ‘territorial trap’, a range of publications within human geography have provided incisive critiques of methodological territorialism. See e.g. (Agnew, 1994; Brenner, 1999, p. 46)

<sup>8</sup> Some South Asian borderlands are analysed in (Middleton & Shneiderman, 2008; Schendel, 2005). See also (Schendel & Abraham, 2005).

constitution of these scales can be seen as part of this politics. With this in mind, it became untenable to approach the Limbuwan and Gorkhaland movements simply as local struggles within national politics. It also became harder and harder to make sense of these contemporary movements without looking towards the historical constitution of the political landscape in which they were taking place.

It was on the basis of these shifting reflections that the perspectives and scaffolding of this present study emerged. Crossing both territorial and disciplinary borders, I regard it somewhat as an experiment. Conceptually, it is an experiment in how to approach contemporary government and politics outside a strictly national territorial framework. Methodologically, it is an experiment in how to combine a limited range of minute, ethnographic observations and in-depth textual analyses with a broad historical and geographical scope. And analytically it is an experimental investigation into what we can make of contemporary politics of local autonomy and place-making if we also look at the sides that national territorialisation tends to obscure.

#### **Towards a Non-Territorial Approach to Government and Politics**

Over the last couple of decades, a lot has been said and written about globalisation and the fate of the nation-state. Today, very few would dismiss the notion of increased global connectivity. Our imagination of politics (and related thoughts on democracy) however remains substantially tied to the national territorialisation of the globe. Within social scientific discourse, political science seems to be the discipline that upholds this segmentation most rigorously in spite of multiple, innovative attempts at spatial re-imagination. We insistently continue to evaluate contemporary politics – not least in the “third world” – in relation to national territorial units. We discuss whether India is really

the world’s largest democracy, whether Nepal is a fragile state, and we compare them with other nation-states in international rankings of economic performance, governmental transparency, electoral processes etc. Of course there continue to be good reasons for an empirical focus on the national scale. Great powers continue to be invested at the nation-state both materially and symbolically. Nonetheless, in the present study I show that we also miss a great deal of powerful political dynamics if we continue to approach contemporary politics through what John Agnew and others have called ‘methodological territorialism’.

I would like, already here, to highlight three characteristics where my approach provides novel perspectives. Firstly, my study spans a relatively long stretch of history on the South Asian subcontinent. I connect a synthetic presentation of studies on the imperial (non-)government of the hills with a spatial history of the national territories of Nepal in general and India with a specific focus on North Bengal. By cutting across this historical stretch rather than beginning in the mid-twentieth, as many political studies of India do, my study enables us to see how the Limbuwan and Gorkhaland movements in their global connectivity reactivate and refashion various forms of imperial difference that the national histories of India and Nepal obscure. This historical perspective enables me e.g. to show how much the contemporary globalised representation of Darjeeling replays the colonial aesthetic of the hill station and how the contemporary governmental arrangements similarly resemble an imperial government at a distance. Hence, the methodological sacrifices that my substantial reliance on secondary sources naturally entails are, I would argue,

outweighed by the critical appreciation of the present moment that the long historical perspective enables.

Secondly, my study crosses contemporary territorial borders rather than relying on them for the production of analytical units for research and comparison. As I argue in chapter three, one of the ways ‘methodological territorialism’ enters studies of politics is exactly through a widespread spatial delineation of units of analysis in accordance with the contemporary territorial ordering of the globe. When applying a longer historical perspective or looking carefully at contemporary global connectivity these territorial delineations however appear less natural than we often assume. My study builds on this recognition by focusing on what is, today, a national borderland as the overall object of analysis. Although the national border analytically constricts most existing histories and political analyses of this area, I try to cut across it.<sup>9</sup> What this perspective enables is an appreciation of how the border – and hence the national territorialisation of the landscape – works. It enables me e.g. to show how some things (Nepali-looking people, various licit and illicit goods, and socio-cultural connections) are allowed to cross the border, while other things (most importantly “politics”) is not. Such insights, in turn allow for an empirically founded, rather than a pre-supposed, appreciation of the contemporary power of the nation-state.

Finally, my study also cuts across the disciplinary landscapes of academia. While my focus on government and politics positions my study to feed into discussions within political science, my approach to concepts such as space, landscape, territory, scale, place-making and

<sup>9</sup> A few articles are the exception to the rule here. See (Hutt, 1997; Shneiderman, 2010)

global connectivity owes a lot to theoretical reflections that have evolved within human geography, anthropology and cultural studies. You could say that I have followed James Scott’s methodological advice to allow at least half of what you read to be outside your home discipline.<sup>10</sup> I see this cross-disciplinarity as one of the main strengths of the present study. Thinking along with reflections in human geography has allowed me to see space as a social product and examine the historical production of spatial categories such as plains, hills, and territories. Thinking along with reflections in anthropology has allowed me to consider the political role of non-discursive practices (as the contemporary public spectacle of Darjeeling) and provided inspiration on how to engage a multi-sited study outside the comparative framework that inspires much of my home discipline. Finally, especially Appadurai’s writing on public culture and global connectivity has allowed me a more complex appreciation of the ways in which my locality of study connects to dynamics of tourism, branding, heritage, and indigeneity across the globe.

### **Producing a Place of One’s Own**

As stated above, this study begins with a concern for contemporary claims to local autonomy. Such claims are no novelty to the South Asian subcontinent. Since the reorganisation of the India states in 1956, no less than fifteen new states and eleven “Autonomous Councils” have been formed. Much of this territorial and governmental rearrangement took place across the 70s and 80s, but the dynamics continue. In 2000, the three new states, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, were formed, in 2003 a Bodoland and a second Ladakh

<sup>10</sup> See the interview with Scott at Theory Talks: <http://www.theory-talks.org/2010/05/theory-talk-38.html> (accessed December 2012)

Autonomous Council were established, and in 2011 the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was transformed into the new Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. In Nepal, movements for local autonomy have been less pronounced until the fall of autocratic government in 1990. However, after a federal future has been placed on the national horizon during the negotiations of a new constitution for Nepal a long list of statehood movements have emerged. There is, in other words, both a long legacy and continued dynamics related to the local autonomy across the two nation-states. But how do contemporary conditions for local autonomy differ from earlier times? And how are we to approach such movements today? Before engaging these questions, I'll present a small anecdote.<sup>11</sup>

From May to September 2007 Indian TV broadcasted the talent show Indian Idol 3. Over the weeks of competition, as more and more contestants were eliminated, the viewership and popularity of the show soared, crossing the border into Nepal. Here, Nepali media had gradually begun to take note of one remaining contestant. Employed as a police officer in Darjeeling, Prashant Tamang was part of the large 'Indian Nepali' or 'Gorkha' population in the area. Performing several songs in Nepali and, occasionally even wearing the Nepali *dhaka topi*, Tamang's participation in the competition quickly attained a wider symbolical significance for the Indian Nepalis of Darjeeling as well as the 'Nepali Nepalis' across the border. Eventually, he won the competition. Part of the reason for Tamang's victory and some of its major consequences are to be found in the borderland area of northern

<sup>11</sup> This anecdote was first presented to me by Christopher Townsend in Darjeeling. Later, Harsha Man Maharjan for Martin Chautari in Kathmandu generously shared the insights from a paper he is writing on the story – hopefully it will be published for wider readership soon.

West Bengal. Here, the Gorkha National Liberation Front 'strongman' Bimal Gurung had taken up the leadership of a Prashant Tamang Fan Club. During the competition, the fan club organised Indian Idol polling booths at the Kakarbhitta and Pashupatinagar border-crossings. Here, Nepali residents could and did cross the border to cast their SMS votes from Indian mobile phones. Paralleling the illicit granting of dual citizenship to Nepalis to form 'vote banks' in times of 'real' elections, this arrangement seemed to work. Prashant Tamang's victory also became Bimal Gurung's, who utilised his new popularity to take over the leadership of the Gorkhaland movement.

This little anecdote from the hills between India and Nepal illustrates the complex position in which the contemporary production of place and claims to local autonomy operate. As the national appropriation of a globalised talent show template, Indian Idol 3 suddenly had an impact on the local politics in Darjeeling. Obviously cutting across spatial scales, the show illuminates existing complications of difference and belonging. Albeit the Nepali viewers seemed to love Tamang's representation of a unified national identity symbolised by dress and language, the same symbols were under sharp attack in Nepali politics. Here, the enforced national unity of the 70s and 80s is currently countered by an emphasis on ethnic difference and historical marginalisation. On the other side of the border in Darjeeling, many of the same ethnic groups are, on the other hand, presently under pressure to conform to a common Gorkhaland front. Like many of the observations in my study, the story of Prashant Tamang thus illustrates how contemporary movements for autonomy operated in a complex contemporary situation where globalised phenomena connect deeply with local realities.

Much of existing literature on movements for local autonomy in India seems, I would argue, somewhat out of tune with such a contemporary condition. Often, these works employ a language of economic development or conflict and national security.<sup>12</sup> These languages are, however, typically attuned to a distinctly national territorial framework. As I describe in the present analysis, the notion of development e.g. brings along its own particular spatial arrangements. This renders economic development problematic as an analytical perspective on movements that, in some sense, might evade or disturb this spatiality. Notions of security provide other problems. Apart from a strong association with the nation-state, assessments of security often bring in differentiations of ‘peaceful’ and ‘unruly’ places. As my analysis brings out, such notions can, however, be seen as internal elements in the government of space.

What is needed instead, I argue, is an approach which – instead of pitting the local against the national – acknowledges that neither claims to local autonomy nor government are can be purely assigned to local and national scales today. Here, I attempt to do so by approaching the production of place as a globalised phenomenon and by critically investigating the spatiality of contemporary government across scales.

### **A Tour of the Study**

In his classic book *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau refers to a study in which New York residents describe their apartments. He points out how there seems to be two ways to go about this (Certeau, 1984, pp. 118-122; see also Linde & Labov, 1975). The

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. (Sarkar, 2010) for a long list of analyses that approach the Gorkhaland movement in terms of economic development. See e.g. (Baruah, 1999, 2005) for a pointed critique of the security focus in analyses of movements in northeast India.

first might be called the ‘map’ type. Here, the residents describe the relative position of the rooms and features as a tableau, as something seen. The second type might be called the ‘tour’. Here, movement is the central characteristic of the description. Rooms and features are described as you encounter them while moving about the space of the apartment. Among the New York residents interviewed, only about three per cent described their home along the lines of a ‘map’ narrative structure, the rest chose to take the interviewer on a narrated ‘tour’ of the place. As de Certeau notes, the opposite seems to be the case in scientific discourse. Here, the map and its centralised legibility prevails over the tour (Certeau, 1984, p. 119). Nonetheless, in line with theoretical and methodological reflections outlined in the following two chapters, I would describe the rest of this study more along the lines of a ‘tour’ than a ‘map’.

Before beginning our tour across the Himalayan hills, the following chapter sets out a range of conceptual reflections. Springing out of my engagement with the governmental and politics of the hills, these reflections provide tentative steps towards a non-territorial conceptualisation of government and politics. The steps I suggest involve an analytical starting point in landscapes rather than territories and a focus on the government of ecological, territorial and anthropological differences across the three assemblages outlined above. Chapter three sets out the path that I have chosen to follow in my analytical journey across the hills. I present and discuss the textual and ethnographic sites around which the arguments of study have been built. And I argue for a conceptualisation of my units of investigation in terms of political locations rather than in the more traditional terms of cases. Finally, I discuss the various levels in which history has been

brought into the analysis, and I reflect upon the kinds of knowledge that my interpretive approach produces.

Then, in chapter four, I begin the journey along the line that distinguishes the hills from plains traversing several millennia of the history of the northern subcontinent. I follow the Gorkha and British expansions into and across the hills and take note of the gazes and differentiations that enabled the rule of the imperial landscape. In chapter five, I turn to the nationalised schooling of Nepal and present how the expansion of education and circulation of school textbooks have facilitated a shift from a Gorkha imperial landscape to a Nepali national territory. I, however also not how this territory only superficially concealed the differences that were an essential part of the imperial landscape. In chapter six, I return to these differences and analyse how they are played out in the contemporary politics of federalism in general and of the Limbuwan movement in particular. In this analysis, I show how the refashioning of imperial differences as indigenous belong through local as well as international academic texts give leverage to the demand of a Limbuwan state in a federal Nepal. I, however, also note how this very politics can also have excluding consequences, as 'ethnic fluency' becomes a criterion for entering the on-going politics – a criterion that replays differences between 'developed' and 'backward' people.

In chapter seven, we cross the border and investigate the various national territorial perspectives that came to circumscribe Darjeeling across the midnight of 1947. I show how Darjeeling repeatedly falls through the cracks of continued ecological differentiations of civilised plains and savage hills. And I argue that what emerges instead is a representation of Darjeeling as the 'ruly' hills of the colonial hills

station. In this image, the governmental gaze connects with that of the tourist. In this connection repeated parallels between colonial government and contemporary branding and heritage endeavours wholly obscure the national historical watershed of 1947. Then, in chapter eight, I turn to the meeting between this image and the Gorkhaland movement in the late 80s as well as today. I find that the Gorkhaland movement, counter-intuitively, does not seem to represent a different assignment of meaning to Darjeeling as a place. Often, the movement rather seems to rely on the unsettled character of the area and feed on anxieties of being 'out of place'. An investigation that began I began with question of what Gorkhaland is, thus tuned out to illuminate instead a struggle of who controls Gorkhaland. As I suggests towards the end of the chapter, it seems that the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha and the new government of West Bengal are moving towards a renewed arrangement of somewhat imperial government at distance – symbolically organised around a refashioned image of the familiar hill station. Finally, in chapter nine I summarize and reflect upon the insights and conclusions from the study.

## Chapter 2: Ecology, Territory, People

*Curiously, space is a stranger to customary political reflection. Political thought and the representations which it elaborates remain “up in the air,” with only an abstract relation with the soil [terroirs] and even the national territory... Space belongs to the geographers in the academic division of labor. But then it reintroduces itself subversively through the effects of peripheries, the margins, the regions, the villages and local communities long abandoned, neglected, even abused through centralising state power. (...) this requires a spatialization of political theory. (Henri Lefebvre cited in Brenner & Elden, 2009, p. 360)*

*Representations of space in the social sciences are remarkably dependent on images of break, rupture and disjunction. The distinctiveness of societies, nations, and cultures is based upon a seemingly unproblematic division of space, on the fact that they occupy “naturally” discontinuous spaces. The premise of discontinuity forms the starting point from which to theorize contact, conflict and contradiction between cultures and societies. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 6)*

In the introduction above, I sketched out the historical production of three governmental assemblages: imperial landscapes, national territories and the glocal production of place. I argued that, although these perspectives emerged on the South Asian subcontinent at different points in time, they are all, in various ways, present in the political dynamics of place-making and claims to local autonomy in the contemporary global conjuncture. In this chapter, I translate this historical sketch into the more analytical language of a government and politics of difference. I highlight three languages of difference that combine, in different ways, to facilitate the historical governmental assemblages outlined in the introduction: a language of ecological

difference, a language of territorial difference, and a language of difference between people. Combining this perspective on government with an approach that begins with landscape rather than territory, I seek, in this chapter, to suggest one way in which we may move towards a non-territorialised theory of government and politics.

### Maps in the Mind

Image yourself sitting in front of two maps. One is a “political” map, the other “topographical”. Place them side-by-side and consider the differences. One map presents landmasses, elevation, contours, vegetation, rivers, lakes and valleys – the ecological textures of the physical landscape. The other map presents a jigsaw puzzle of truncated spaces, neatly coloured and sharply bordered pieces, flat areas with no bleeding boundaries, shared borders with no in-betweens. Why is one of these maps “political” while the other map isn’t? What qualities constitute the specifically *political* spatiality that one map displays and the other one doesn’t?

The answers to these questions, I would argue, have a lot to say about our spatial imagination of politics. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson suggest in the quote above, we live in a world where politics is imagined in the language of spatially organised disjuncture. The ‘maps in our minds’ largely reflect the image of the school atlas described above, dividing the globe into bordered world regions, national territories, and local administrative entities (Ludden, 2003b; Malkki, 1992). At the same time, counter-images of global connectivity – ‘scapes’ and ‘flows’ – proliferate (see e.g. Arjun Appadurai, 1996). Notions of globalisation have led us to question whether the territorial sovereignty that we presume exists at the national scale will continue in the future or whether new “scalar fixes” of political authority will



emerge. Nonetheless, the political consequences of global re-scaling are routinely brought back to the well-known governmental scales of the school atlas – most often the national (see e.g. Agnew, 1994; Brenner, 1997, 1999).

As we, thus, find ourselves wedged in between national orders and global flows we tend to forget that other “topographical” kind of map. We tend to forget that government is extended over landscape as much as it is extended over people, and that even contemporary politics is played out in specific ‘political landscapes’.<sup>13</sup> In academic and political discourse today, we largely imagine states to be sovereign within their respective territories. If they turn out not to be, we tend to provide them with limiting adjectives: then they are not full, proper states, but “fragile” or even “failed” ones. As I argue in the present study, this territorialized view of the world is not only a consequence of the development of more and more elaborate ‘distance demolishing’ technologies of rule, but also a consequence of certain contemporary fantasies about the spatial uniformity of territorial government.

In this study I extended an invitation to de-territorialise our imagination of government by rethinking connections between government and the landscape across which it is extended. My study lends itself to such rethinking by investigating multiple forms of government from various historical and contemporary vantage points in/on the unusually rugged landscape of the India-Nepal borderland. I argue that the ecological characteristics of the land and the imperial government of the landscape provide a political framework, a distinct governmental gaze that continues to inform the contemporary

<sup>13</sup> In a forthcoming article, Stuart Elden suggests that Foucault’s writing might have pointed us in this, misleading, direction (Elden, 2013).

government and politics of the area in multiple ways. Although, over the last sixty years, national discourses, maps and images have sought to flatten the landscape of the borderland into the un-textured, uniform and strictly bordered spaces of the school atlas, an ‘imperial landscape’ of differences continues to influence government and politics within and across national territories. By focusing on the extension of government and the interplay of governmental categories of differences across distance and difficult terrain, my study thus provides input towards a theory of government and politics that allow notions of place and landscape to re-enter our political imagination.

It should be noted straight away that I do not mean to say that physical landscapes are strictly determining for contemporary government and politics, nor that no change has occurred since the time of British and Gorkha imperialism. Far from it. But I do highlight how imperial categories of governmental difference continue to influence present politics, albeit in novel and increasingly globalised ways. I e.g. bring out how the colonial representation of Darjeeling in the harmonious image of the picturesque hill station is repeated in a contemporary merger of the governmental gaze with that of the globalised tourist-consumer. And I analyse how representatives of a present-day movement in eastern Nepal, in their aspirations for a future federal state of Limbuwan, connect imperial categories of difference and national territorial borders with international academic scholarship and globalised notions of indigeneity. Through such investigations my study points to the variously mediated connections that exist between the landscape, on the one hand, and contemporary government and politics on the other. These connections include the physical barriers to government that rugged landscapes provide, but also the ways in which

governmental intervention in turn shapes the landscape, and the ways in which representations of the landscape are brought into politics to support or oppose the existing governmental order.

Why would one want to move towards a non-territorialised theory of government and politics? It is one of my central claims with this study that, if one were to approach the dynamics of contemporary movements for increased local autonomy in the Himalayan hills from a perspective shaped by the school atlas segmentation of the world, then one would miss a lot of the politics involved. As I describe below, regimes do not govern territories, they produce them through the extension of governmental gazes across the landscape – a process which in turn borders politics. If we begin our investigation from these borders then we miss out on the politics involved in their instantiation on the landscape as well as the politics of territorially internal differences and global connectivity that the territorialisation of the globe obscures.

The observations that led me to this claim can be summarised quite well in an interesting quote from the Argentinian scholar Walter Magnolo. He states that:

coloniality is, on the one hand, what the project of modernity needs to rule out and roll over in order to implant itself as modernity and, on the other hand, the site of enunciation where the blindness of the modern project is revealed, and concomitantly also the site where new projects begin to unfold (cited in Escobar, 2008, p. 168).

We might see Magnolo's "coloniality" as the imperial landscape described in my introduction. The basic tension that I describe between this landscape and the modern national territory is exactly one where, as Magnolo describes, the territory "needs to rule out and roll over" the imperial landscape in order to qualify as a modern and national

territory. As we see in the contemporary dynamics of the glocal place-making, the languages of difference facilitating the imperial landscape however continue below the superficial uniformity on the national territory and provide a different "site of enunciation" in the politics of local autonomy. In the following conceptual delineations I move towards an approach that respects this contemporary site of enunciation by beginning not from the modern territory, but from the imperial landscape. As Magnolo suggest, the added value of this perspective is firstly, that it reveals the "blindness" of modern territorial imagination along with the differences that this imagination seeks to obscure, and secondly, that it enables an appreciation of the continued and politically salient play of these differences – in creative as well as repressive ways (see Kaur & Wahlberg, 2012).

In the remainder of this chapter, I delineate the ways in which my engagement with the India-Nepal borderland has spurred reflections on imperial landscapes, national territories, and the government of difference. In the following section, I present how I have come to see 'landscape' as an alternative starting point for the present study's engagement with government and politics. I then delineate what I mean by the government and politics of difference and highlight three categories of difference - three governmental gazes - that have historically influenced the extension of government across the borderland: differences of ecology, differences of territory, and differences of people. The subsequent sections consider these three categories in turn highlighting their local and historical significance as well as their political salience in the present global conjuncture.

### **An Alternative Beginning: Landscape and its Government**

In this study I evade a pre-given focus on national territory by taking landscape and the imperial government of it as a starting point. In the borderland where I have conducted fieldwork for the present study this landscape includes lush forested hills, deep river valleys, tea gardens with their rows of dark green bushes marking out the elevation, and - occasionally visible – the snow-clad peaks of the Kanchenjunga massive. In this landscape, it is hard to find any significant level areas, and both the towns that housed my fieldwork are perched, precariously on cloud-swept ridges. The physical landscape of this borderland, in other words, provides a marked contrast to the flat territories of the school atlas. Hence, it works as a constant visual reminder of the abstract flatness of national territories, of the multiple levels of difference within territories that this abstraction conceals, and of the similarities that territorial borders tend to obscure. In this sense, the geological and ecological character of the landscape provides both an empirical starting point and a critical methodological intervention for the study.

In everyday usage the notion of landscape usually brings up aesthetic qualities. As the Oxford English dictionary defines the word, it thus comprises “all the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal”<sup>14</sup>. The problem with this, however, is that notions of aesthetic appeal, harmony, and order tend to repeal notions of political dominance, conflict, and unruliness (A. T. Smith, 2003, p. 9). In the representation of Darjeeling in the image of the picturesque hill station this tendency is clear. The aesthetically harmonious landscape of the hill station and its surrounding tea

<sup>14</sup> <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/landscape?q=landscape>  
(accessed October 2012)

plantations lends itself to notions of order, which in turn leads to the representation of the violent Gorkhaland uprising as intermittent unruliness, foreign to the picturesque landscape. What begins as a supposedly non-political aesthetic thus turns out to have major political consequences for a centralised view of the area and, in turn, for its government.

In line with scholarly reflections on landscape across multiple academic disciplines, I therefore suggest that we regard landscape in a sense that connects to, rather than repeals, government, politics and conflict (Kenny, 1995; W. J. T. Mitchell, 1994; K. Olwig, 2002; K. Olwig & Mitchell, 2009; K. R. Olwig & Mitchell, 2007; A. T. Smith, 2003). Emphasising the existence of a ‘darker side’ to our visualisation of the notion of landscape in the picturesque aesthetic of the landscape painting, W.J.T. Mitchell e.g. foregrounds the notion of an ‘imperial landscape’. While he, on the one hand, emphasises that landscape “is a particular historical formation associated with European imperialism” (as in the hill station imagination of Darjeeling), he, on the other hand, also states that “landscape is a medium found in all cultures” (W. J. T. Mitchell, 1994, p. 5). Hence, albeit recognising that there is a strong connection between our conception of landscape and a specific European history of colonial domination, we might apply a broader view of the connection between landscape and power. From the private garden in contemporary Australia, to the hill station landscape in colonial India, various authors have already shown such connections (Cerwonka, 2004; Kenny, 1995). In this study, I take these insights further by exploring the tension between the ‘imperial landscapes’ articulated in the government of the north Indian subcontinent and the national territories that “role over” these landscapes later on.

In order to get a grasp of the political entanglement of the landscape that I analyse in the present study, I propose that we begin from the simple recognition of landscape as the combination of “a focus on the material topography of a portion of land (that which can be seen) with the notion of vision (the way it is seen)” (see also Cosgrove, 1985; Cresswell, 2004, p. 10). As the dictionary definition of landscape refers to the “visible features of an area”, these features are obviously visible *to someone*. The materiality of the landscape is mediated through vision as well as through human intervention (K. Olwig, 2002). As Appadurai’s more fluid ‘scapes’, the land-scape as I employ the term, is thus a “deeply perspectival construct” (Arjun Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). And like Appadurai’s scapes, the perspectival construction of the landscape might evolve across a much more dispersed geography than the locality that provides its material point of reference. The landscapes I engage in the present study typically involve large-scale material interventions or more-or-less widely circulated representations in text or image. And, as described below, they involve perspectives that have distinct links to the governmental gaze of imperial rule.

In a more substantive sense, I see landscapes as “broad canvas[es] of space and place constituted within histories of social and cultural life” (A. T. Smith, 2003, p. 11). Here, place refers not only to simple location (as in position on the Earth’s surface), or locale (as in built and natural environment), but also to a certain, shared form of meaning attached to that location/locale – what John Agnew refers to as a ‘sense of place’ (Cresswell, 2004, pp. 7-8). Place, in other words, “refers to how specific locales become incorporated into larger worlds of human action and meaning” (A. T. Smith, 2003, p. 11) – in the sense

I employ it in this study, meaning shared among wider groups of people. Space, on the other hand, “refers to the general concepts of extension and dimension that constitute form” (A. T. Smith, 2003, p. 11), space is ‘in-between’ places (cf. Certeau, 1984, p. 127). Hence, the notion of landscape, as I use it here, “assemble places to present more broadly coherent visions of the world” (A. T. Smith, 2003, p. 32).

### Government, Politics, and Difference

In this study, I suggest that we might see government as an organisation of various forms of difference. I deliberately employ the word “government”, a word usually monopolised by the national scale, to emphasise that I am not talking about a different, alternative or residual form of rule to the territorial default. I am not trying to delineate a *globalised governance* (or whatever one might call it) that takes places in parallel or in competition with traditional, territorially based *government*. As I see it, such an endeavour would only go part of the way in rethinking the contemporary spatiality of government and politics as it would continue to rely on a territorial approach, albeit with certain additions. What I suggest is that all government operates, in one way or the other, through the organisation of difference and that these differences, in turn, provide grounds that both enable and restrict politics.<sup>15</sup>

The three governmental assemblages that I refer to in the introduction (imperial landscapes, national territories and glocal place-making) can thus be seen as different ways of organising difference. As I argue in the present section, we might analyse the organisation of

<sup>15</sup> This line of thinking obviously owes a great deal to writings by William Connolly and Gilles Deleuze, the latter of which I have mainly encountered in other scholars’ interpretations so far (Connolly, 1991, 1995; Kaur & Wahlberg, 2012; May, 2005).

difference that each assemblage employs through certain governmental gazes that relate to three ‘languages of difference’: ecology, territory, and people.<sup>16</sup> In very general terms, the imperial landscape of the British colonisers thus regarded people through a language of racial difference that coincided with an ecological differentiation between hills and plains and a territorial perspective that allowed for uneven forms of government, especially at the territorial frontiers. The imperial landscape of the Gorkha rulers was organised along other lines of difference, as was the later national territory of India.

In slightly different terms, one might say that the relationship between landscape and its government that I seek to illuminate in the present study is fundamentally about the production of legibility and governability through various ‘governmental gazes’.<sup>17</sup> I see the governmental gaze as an assemblage of knowledge and power in a specific, focused vision. Such an assemblage involves a range of different actors with a range of different motivations assembled around a shared gaze.<sup>18</sup> Coming together, these actors not only build a certain vision of the world, but, through this vision, they also powerfully affect the world. The colonial hill station of Darjeeling provides a good example of this. Here, in the second half of the nineteenth century,

<sup>16</sup> I borrow the term ‘languages of difference’ from a recent article by Ravinder Kaur and Ayo Wahlberg but employ it, in this study, at a lower level of abstraction than they do. The languages of difference that Kaur and Wahlberg present relate to processes of standardisation, commodification and alterity (see Kaur & Wahlberg, 2012)

<sup>17</sup> Obviously, this notion owes a lot to Foucault’s and probably even more to James Scott’s work (Foucault, 2007; Scott, 1998, 2009). In its connection to territory, it also owes a great deal to recent theoretical developments within human geography (Brenner & Elden, 2009; Elden, 2007, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> As Scott argues, the state is often a central actor and centralised legibility is often a crucial motivation, but, as I see it, the governmental gaze is often shared more widely (Scott, 1998).

tourists, scientific explorers, government officials, and tea-planters with their separate motivations assembled around a specific (though multi-faceted) vision of the hill station. In turn, this vision led to a rapid and fundamental transformation of the area in involving e.g. massive immigration and ordering of the landscape.

The governmental gaze is, in other words, a way of handling a complex reality in a way that makes it legible and governable from a centralised position. This obviously resonates well with Scott’s incisive description of the production of legibility through focused vision. This is worth quoting of at length:

Certain forms of knowledge and control require a narrowing of vision. The great advantage of such tunnel vision is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality. This very simplification, in turn, makes the phenomenon at the centre of the field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation. Combined with similar observations, an overall, aggregate, synoptic view of a selective reality is achieved, making possible a high degree of schematic knowledge, control and manipulation (Scott, 1998, p. 11)

The Himalayan hills provide a good example of what Scott refers to as a “complex and unwieldy reality” – a complex geography that with rows, upon rows of deep valleys and soaring hills provides a massive challenge for centralised government. As Scott suggests elsewhere, such hills provide ecological zones that have historically been extremely hard to penetrate by the governmental gaze of the settled valley states (Scott, 2009). Hence, the government of the Himalayan hills that I engage in the present study relies fundamentally on a

narrowing of vision in specific governmental gazes that organises the world around specific categories of difference.

Such government, I argue, sets out specific categories of difference that shape the possibilities and barriers for politics. Inherent in this argument, is a relatively broad approach to politics as relating to every situation that combines *conflict* with *power* (see Warren, 1999, pp. 217-218).<sup>19</sup> Within this broad approach to politics, government as I have outlined it above, nonetheless renders specific categories of difference and hence specific conflicts more politically salient than others. In other words, if we, following Deleuze, see the world as “composed not of identities that form and reform themselves, but of swarms of difference that actualize themselves into specific forms of identity” (May, 2005, p. 114) then government can be seen as a major force in organising differences into political identities no matter whether the governors intend to do so or not. As Bernard Cohn e.g. describes, the difference of caste as it was emphasised by British census operations – a technique of colonial government – enabled the emergence of caste as a political identity among a swarm of difference. In my study, I provide a range of other examples that fundamentally support the same point: that government to a very large degree shapes politics.

In summary, the present study analyses how the governmental gazes that have been brought to bear on the landscape of the Nepal-India borderland work through the constitution of multiple categories of difference approached through various vantage points. I argue that one can understand the historical dynamics involved in the extension of

<sup>19</sup> Here, conflict should be seen as relating not only to material interests, but also to “contests over the symbolic world, over the management and appropriation of meaning” (Wedeen, 1999, p. 30).

government over the landscape by focusing on three such languages of difference: differences of ecology, territory and people – discussed in turn below. In the study, I trace how these differences have been “constructed, manifested, governed, mobilised and obscured” (Kaur & Wahlberg, 2012, p. 576) across long stretches of governmental history. And I analyse how they are played out, refashioned and rearranged, today, in new claims to difference that partake in the contemporary politics of local autonomy.

### **Ecology: Government and Governability of Hills and Plains**

Anyone who has travelled or worked in the Himalayan foothills will recognise the obvious challenges posed by the geography of the area to centralised forms of organisation. Even today, in spite of a broad range of ‘distance demolishing’ technologies (Scott, 2009), centralised government continues to be a challenge. When a powerful international organisation as the World Food Program provides supplementary food to some of the food-insecure areas in northern Nepal, negotiating passage through the politically contentious “Tibetan Autonomous Region” of China is preferred to transporting the food through Nepal.<sup>20</sup> And during preparations for the CA elections, a team of election observers were hit by severe altitude sickness and snowstorms in north-eastern Nepal reducing the able observers from eleven to four.<sup>21</sup> If difficulties such as these occur to internationally supported, centrally administered government today, we can only imagine that the challenges of government were even more severe when centralised imperial rule was first extended across the area.

<sup>20</sup> WFP officer, personal communication, Kathmandu 2007

<sup>21</sup> Reported in local media. See e.g. <http://hamropalo.com/altitude-sickness-snowfall-affect-poll-officials-in-taplejung/> (accessed December 2012)

The difficulties of governing the Himalayan hills are reflected in the first language of difference that I bring out in the present study: ecology. For several millennia, the ecological distinction between plains and hills guided the governmental gaze of the valley empires across the northern part of the Indian subcontinent (see e.g. S. Guha, 1999; Ludden, 2002). For the valley empires, the plains and their agricultural settlement were synonymous with civilisation, while the hills with their more sparse population of slash-and-burn cultivators, hunters, gatherers and traders were seen as un-civilised. As presented e.g. by the British colonial officer Edward Gait in chapter four, this distinction of culture and civilisation was also one of government and governability. Seen as essentially different from the plains, the hills were regarded as in need of government “in a simpler and more personal manner” (Gait, 1906, p. 330), that is, a less standardised and less elaborate form of government – a government at a distance. The ecological line of distinction running across the length of the northern subcontinent thus also provided a governmental border, a spatial line of demarcation dividing settlement and civilisation from migration and wilderness.

This ‘imperial landscape’ – the combination of an ecological materiality with the governmental gaze of various imperial formations – continues to play an important role for political organisation and notions of belonging inside and across national territories even today. As illustrated by the anecdote on the Nepali president introducing this study, the ecological distinction between plains and hills continues to have a political life today, played out through notions of identity and belonging that, sometimes, cut across national territorial boundaries. Furthermore, as several scholars have illustrated, this distinction also

stretches far into the spatial imagination – the ‘maps in the mind’ – of area studies as an academic field. This situation is reflected e.g. in the differential treatment of the Nepali and Indian nation-states within the imagination of South Asia (Chene, 2007; Ludden, 2003b; Schendel, 2002).

In the area-studies mapping of the world into cultural regions both the Nepali and Indian nation-state formations are clearly placed in ‘South Asia’. Within this category, they however take up very different positions. While India clearly dominates the imagination of South Asia in South Asian studies – almost to the point of defining the field – Nepal, on the other hand, holds a more dubious position. In a thought-provoking article, Mary Des Chene provides an apt illustration from the job interview of a Nepal-oriented scholar who, when asked, “But how can you teach South Asia when you work in Nepal” answered “what makes a village in Tamil Nadu more representative of South Asia than some place in Nepal?” (Chene, 2007, p. 210). The answer, as Des Chene suggests, is telling for the combined national and regional order of things that provides the ‘maps in the mind’ for our imagination of the world. In this imagination, the (fantasy of) Hindu, caste-organised Indian plains (think of Dumont, 1970) are ostensibly more defining of a South Asian cultural region than Nepali hills.

What is interesting about this academic imagination of the region is that it replays the imperial division of the area into hills and plains (see Schendel, 2002, p. 648). Although often self-consciously post-colonial, the implicit designation of the border of South Asia at the hills of northern India seems strikingly similar to the British governmental gaze of the area. H. H. Risley (1851-1911), the Director of the Ethnographic Survey of India, e.g. described Nepal as a “sort of

debatable land between Aryan and Mongolian territory” (Risley in Chene, 2007). This imagination of space is clearly repeated in the aesthetic of (earlier) colonial maps of the subcontinent where the northern hills typically appear as a relatively fluid area of rows upon rows of carefully shaded but unnamed hills. Implicitly, post-colonial area studies scholarship thus repeat an imperial mapping of the world in which the ecological difference between plains and hills, and the identification of the South Asian cultural region with the former are defining features. While this area studies division is not necessarily problematic, it can be if the division is divorced from its history and posed as an essential division of cultural identities, or if it ends up overshadowing the salience of the territorial borders between present-day nation states (see Shneiderman, 2010).

I engage the ecological distinction between hills and plains exactly from its historical constitution as a governmental category of difference (distinguishing governable from un-governable spaces). In doing so, I follow in the footsteps of recent scholarship that has turned this ecological distinction on its head through the imaginative introduction of the world region *Zomia* (Schendel, 2002; Scott, 2009). For Willem van Schendel and James Scott, *Zomia* is a concerted name for an Asian highland massive that our national and regional imagination of the world usually cuts into a multitude of ‘territorial’ and ‘cultural’ pieces. As Scott describes it:

*Zomia* is a new name for virtually all the lands at altitudes above roughly three hundred meters all the way from the Central Highlands of Vietnam to northeast India and traversing five Southeast Asian nations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma) and four provinces of China (Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and part of Sichuan). (Scott, 2009, p. ix).

Van Schendel’s *Zomia* stretches even further, including the Tibetan highland as well as the Himalayas and their foothills across India, Bhutan and Nepal (Schendel, 2002, pp. 653-654).<sup>22</sup> In van Schendel’s delineation, *Zomia* thus encompasses my area of study (see also Shneiderman, 2010).

As Scott elaborates in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, *Zomia* is historically to be considered a non-state space – an zone of refuge for people evading the repressive hand of valley states. In the highlands of *Zomia*, the ‘friction of the terrain’ has, according to Scott, repelled states from any form of substantial government – at least until the development of increasingly powerful ‘distance demolishing’ technologies over the past sixty years. In line with this, Scott argues that the hill people of *Zomia* are: “best understood as runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys – slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics, and warfare” (Scott, 2009, p. ix). Scott thus, on the one hand, confirms the governmental salience of the ecological distinction between the hills and the plains, emphasising how the hills have historically proven relatively impenetrable for the governmental gaze of the valley empires. However, Scott, on the other hand, provides a novel perspective from which to see the relationship across this divide. This relationship is no longer seen as a matter of steps on a civilizational ladder (the “backward” hills), nor a simple dichotomous question of (state) dominance and (hill peoples’) resistance (see Shneiderman,

<sup>22</sup> According to a the editorial of a special issue on “*Zomia* and beyond”, van Schendel has later extended his notion of *Zomia* further west across northern Pakistan, large parts of Afghanistan and north into southern Kazakhstan (Michaud, 2010)



2010, p. 303). Rather, in the Zomia-perspective, state and non-state spaces can be regarded as historically tied together in dynamics that bring into sharp relief the political significance of the physical landscape as well as the history of national territories.

The idea of Zomia resonates well with this study in the way that it foregrounds a relational perspective situating the hilly peripheries of national territories and world regions in an explicit relationship to nation-state formations in the valleys. In its focus on imperial landscapes and national territories, my study deals with much the same tension. In my view, the development of ‘distance demolishing’ technologies that Scott claims have eliminated all the world’s Zomias since the Second World War (infrastructural developments, communication technologies etc.) is part and parcel of the translation of hilly imperial landscapes into flat national territories. Much seems to indicate that the area I engage has, at some point, functioned as a zone of refuge, a Zomia, for people fleeing imperial expansions in the Tibetan plateau and Indian plains (English, 1985; Shneiderman, 2010). Later, empire was superimposed upon the area, and today we regard it as part of the ubiquitous national segmentation of the globe. However, remnants of these various governmental stages exist within contemporary national government and with them the relevance of the ecological language of difference.

#### **Territory: Borders and Belonging**

The early British maps of India usually display a host of the textures in the landscape. Especially the northern hills and mountains of Nepal and Bhutan are often depicted as numerous, carefully shaded hills fading into the horizon. Gradually, and especially after 1947, this depiction changes. The textures of the landscape are increasingly obscured and

the fluid northern frontiers transform into firmer borders. Through these maps, we can follow the visual ascendancy of the second language of difference that I highlight in the present study: territory. As for the ecological distinction between plains and hills, I argue that territory can be regarded as a specific category of governmental distinction; a governmental gaze that enables a highly focused and simplified view of an otherwise “complex and unwieldy” landscape. As a governmental gaze, territory focuses on the spatial disjuncture of borders, on internal homogeneity inside those borders, and on difference across them. With this focus, the territorial gaze divides the landscape into the distinct but uniform spaces that we know from the school atlas – different in colour, but isoform, unambiguously bordered and contiguous.

As I argue in chapters four and five, the shift towards a governmental gaze organised around the distinction of national territories rather than ecologically delimited spaces involves a number of processes. It, first and foremost, involves a management of territorially internal differences that, at least superficially, differs from the imperial past. In the mid-twentieth century, both the Indian and Nepali nation-states are cast explicitly in opposition to the oppressive rule of the former imperial states. Built upon the opposition to the British Raj by the anti-colonial movement in India and the overthrow of the Rana regime by the 1950 revolution in Nepal, the Indian and Nepali nation-states are posed as negations of earlier inequality and oppression. Both states are presented through the endlessly repeated notion of ‘unity-in-diversity’ – a notion of equality as national citizens across ‘sub-national’ differences (see e.g. S. Roy, 2007). I argue, however, that the new national territories at best ‘roll over’, rather than

‘rule out’, the differentiation of people and places that provided the basis for imperial rule. Within, as well as across, the new, flat national territories imperial differences continue beneath a surface of superficial equality. In fact, the ostensibly more uniform and egalitarian government of the new national orders are littered with ‘imperial debris’ – old categories of difference that join “imperial pasts and national presence” (Stoler, 2008, p. 192) – and many decisions are still guided by imperial lines of differentiation.

Notwithstanding territory’s obvious centrality to the global form of the nation-state, the concept has until recently been surprisingly overlooked across the social sciences (Brenner & Elden, 2009; Elden, 2007, 2010). Not least in political science a widespread loyalty to the naturalised territories of the nation-state – a methodological and epistemological territorialism – has impeded critical investigations of the notion of territory (Agnew, 1994; Schendel, 2005). Recent theoretical developments in human geography are, however, pushing for more critical reflection on the historical significance of territory (see Brenner & Elden, 2009; Elden, 2007, 2010). Stuart Elden, e.g. suggests that territory might be regarded as a political technology emerging historically along with the various population-oriented governmental technologies that Foucault describes (Elden, 2007, 2010). Just as population was constituted as a “known” object of governmental intervention through e.g. census operations and aggregate statistics, territory might be seen as a similar sort of object constituted through e.g. cadastral surveys and cartography (Scott, 1998; Strandsbjerg, 2008). Territory thus indicates a political space that is “owned, distributed, mapped, calculated, bordered and controlled” (Elden, 2010, pp. 804-808, 810) and is, in fact, “nothing else but the

effect, the profile, the mobile shape of a perpetual territorialisation” (Elden, 2013, p. 14)

While these theoretical developments are conducive for a rethinking of the productive translation of variegated landscapes into territories, detached theoretical reflection only take us so far. Different territories have arisen at different global historical conjunctures and on different imperial backgrounds affecting the ways in which territory has been produced. While Elden seems, like Foucault, to be working out from an implicit European backdrop, the situation in South Asia was very different. Here, state territories emerged later than in Europe, they emerged within a growing international development regime, and they emerged out of explicit confrontation between imperial regimes and national movements (Chatterjee, 1986; Goswami, 2002, 2004; Ludden, 1992, 2005a; S. Roy, 2007, pp. 13-14). In explicit acknowledgement of this, my study supplements the Foucaultian approach to territory by pointing out how the more humanistic technology of centralised schooling supports the production of a *modern national* territory by extending literacy within a nationally shared language of difference and equality (cf. Anderson, [1991] 2006). In Nepal, where I mainly focus on this, centralised schooling was most likely extended further across the landscape at an earlier point in time than e.g. the cadastral survey.

Looking into the Nepali textbooks, it becomes apparent how the nation is cast in explicit opposition to the hierarchical differentiation of people and places in the imperial past, how the present-day territory is inscribed in history, and how unity-in-diversity is rallied under notions of aesthetic order and future development. It also emerges, however,

that the national territorialisation ‘rolls over’ more than it ‘rules out’ imperial categories of difference.

Seen together, the emergence of national territories as the ruling governmental gaze across India and Nepal illustrates how territory works as a category of difference – that is, how it involves a need not only for territorially internal homogeneity, but also for territorially external difference.<sup>23</sup> The national discourses that enable the production of a superficially uniform territory within both nations are obviously affected by the global conjuncture in which they emerge. One can especially see the reflections of the global post-war development regime in both nations’ immense discursive focus on dichotomies of backwardness and development (Ludden, 1992, 2005a; S. Roy, 2007). With a strong focus on national development, Nepali school textbooks e.g. largely follow in the footsteps of their Indian counterparts. Their national project is, however, cast on a background of particularism. Here, the brave past of Nepali warriors are brought out as a distinctive background for development, and the distinction from the large southern neighbour is further accentuated through the fashioning of Nepal as the world’s last Hindu kingdom. Hence, the play of difference illustrates the role of the nation as “both one of the most universally legitimate articulations of group identity and one of the most enduring and pervasive forms of modern particularism” (Goswami, 2002, p. 775).

Furthermore, territorial delineations not only divide landscapes into distinct albeit isoform spaces, they obviously provide strong normative spaces of belonging, too. As Liisa Malkki, among others,

<sup>23</sup> This involves an interesting play of difference and similarity that illustrate what Manu Goswami has called the ‘doubled nature’ of the nation (Goswami, 2002).

has pointed out we largely live under a ‘national order of things’ in the contemporary world. Reproduced “in ordinary language, in nationalist discourses, and in scholarly studies of nations, nationalism and refugees” this order provides a ‘sedentary’ perspective to our thinking and an ‘arborescent’ imagination of belonging (Malkki, 1992, pp. 25,27-28,31). People and nations are essentially imagined as trees rooted in the soil of national territories. This rooting provides a ‘normative landscape’; a landscape that delineates norms of belonging, of who are ‘in place’ and who are ‘out of place’ and thus ties people to places (see also Cresswell, 1996). As a consequence of this normative landscape, the people that are not staying put – the refugee, the migrant, the displaced – are inherently suspect, ‘uprooted’, ‘out of place’. In my analysis of the Gorkhaland movement (chapter eight) the consequences of this order come out clearly in the anxiety of being ‘out of place’ that fuels the Gorkhaland movement.

#### **People: Caste, Race, Nationality, and Indigenous Rooting**

As I have already touched upon at various points above, the government of landscapes and territories is fundamentally intertwined with the government of people. During British rule, the imperial distinction between the civilised and governable plains and the backward and un-governable hills was overlaid with a racial distinction between plains and hill people. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the overlapping differences of ecology and race thus reinforced each other emphasising the notion that the hills and their people provided a fundamentally different governmental landscape than the plains. Around the same time, the hierarchical organisation of people according to a hierarchy of caste-groups enabled the gradual territorial integration of the Gorkha Empire. Also here, the

governmental differentiation of people was intertwined with the territorial organisation of the landscape. Furthermore, especially over the last decades, claims to ethnic difference have been widespread across the subcontinent. As in the case of the Limbus, these claims often refashion earlier governmental categories of caste and racial difference in the context of indigenous place-making and territorial demands. These situations all, in various ways, highlight the third language of difference that I engage in the present study: people.<sup>24</sup>

Multiple studies of colonial India have already highlighted some of the technologies involved in a governmental gaze organised around the difference between people as well as some of the effects of this kind of organisation (Cohn, 1987b; Dirks, 2001; Kaviraj, 1997, 2010). Bernard Cohn's classic study of the Indian Census e.g. traces how census-categories developed from being essentially governmental distinctions of caste and religion applied to get a grasp of the vast subcontinent, to being categories of popular identification and mobilisation at a much wider scale than ever before (Cohn, 1987b). This overall development includes a shift, as Sudipta Kaviraj has highlighted, from a "fuzzy", fluid sense of community towards a more rigid, "enumerated" sense (Kaviraj, 2000, pp. 187-201). It also, involves a shift from a local sense of community towards a sense of community that spans the emerging territory of the British Raj. Hence, while providing a measure of governmental legibility, the differentiation of people also has the unintended consequence of opening up for collective action at the hitherto unimaginable scale of the imperial territory. In this sense, governmental operations such as

<sup>24</sup> I have chosen the word "people" over alternatives such as nation or ethnicity to indicate a broader overarching commonality (see R. M. Smith, 2003, pp. 12-13)

enumeration, on the one hand, opens a new space for political action while, on the other hand, territorialising that space within the national boundaries delimit the enumerative operations.

I do not have much to add to this already well-established literature in the present study. What I do contribute, however, is an investigation of various relationships between these well-developed, Foucaultian ideas about the government of population and the less-developed notions of government of landscape and territory (Elden, 2007, 2010). As stated above, I find these relationships both in historic government and in present-day refashioning of the categories of difference around which this historic government evolved. An important example of the latter is the notion of indigenous rooting. As the notion of national belonging, indigeneity combines distinctions of people with distinctions of territory (see Malkki, 1992). As I argue in chapter six, this notion cuts across academia and politics in a sense that activates historical and anthropological perspectives in present-day territorial politics. The, often academic, establishment of indigeneity provides substantial political leverage in South Asia today due to its regional and global status as a normative framework of belonging and rights. The politics of indigeneity thus not only connects distinctions of people and territory, but also re-shuffles our habitual spheres and scales of political authority.

When the Limbus engage in the highly localised politics of where the border of a future Limbuwan federal state should be drawn, they do so largely through the association of their claims with globalised notions of indigenous rooting in ancestral landscapes. The establishment of indigeneity provides a globalised form of meaning and authority to Limbuwan as a place in the political landscape, because it

makes that place resonate with broader normative frames about the rooting of people that are present in the national discourse of Nepal (and South Asia) as well as more globally. Hence, the local landscape is made political through global references including a number of international declarations and conventions not least the ILO Convention 169.<sup>25</sup> Since the 1991 Mandal Commission Report in India, and the contemporary political revolution in Nepal, this notion is increasingly viewed as a legitimate source of political claims across South Asia. As Amita Baviskar suggests with reference to India, the “social fact” of indigeneity has begun to raise “a legitimacy that is hard to ignore” across South Asia (Baviskar, 2006, p. 36). Similarly, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine recently suggested that a normative framework regarding indigenous rootedness in a specific territory is very much alive within public discourse in Nepal (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2010; see also Middleton & Shneiderman, 2008).<sup>26</sup>

To complicate matters, today other globalised processes parallel national and indigenous rooting in relation to the production of place. As my analysis of Darjeeling illustrates, globally sanctioned processes of heritage conservation and “Geographical Indications” branding similarly reflect back on local place-making. The generalised production of meaning that I see as crucial to political place-making, thus, not only relates to the rooting of people in a specific soil, but also

<sup>25</sup> Usually referred to simply as “ILO 169” the *ILO Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* is a very popular reference point among ‘indigenous’ representatives in Nepal. In the convention it is clearly stated that, “governments shall respect the special importance for the cultures and spiritual values of the peoples concerned of their relationship with the lands or territories” (Article 13§1).

<sup>26</sup> In her interpretation, the Nepali ‘indigenous’ groups, “associate identity with territory, and establish a genealogical link with their environment, which they conceive as an organic being with which they share common substance” (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2010, p. 123).

to the ‘rooting of things’ considered to have a certain value. As I argue, the geographical certification of Darjeeling Tea not only brands the product, but also the landscape from which it arrives. If seen from the outside, one could, in a sense, argue that tea is more solidly rooted in Darjeeling than a population repeatedly referred to through their migration history. And the heritage status of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railroad ties it to a notion of global, rather than national, history. Selected, certified and fashioned in front of a tourist gaze, this heritage site thus provides a globalised perspective to a highly localised setting – a perspective that does not distinguish between colonial and post-colonial rule in the same way as national discourse does.

### Conclusion

In summary, I seek to move towards a non-territorialised theory of government and politics. I do so, by beginning from a notion of landscape rather than territory. As I, subsequently, consider the relationship between government and this landscape, I emphasise three languages of difference around which the governmental gazes of the assemblages presented in the introduction are built: a language of ecology, a language of territory, and a language of difference. At this abstract, analytical level I thus suggest we might regard the three governmental assemblages: imperial landscapes, the national territories and glocal place-making as different forms of governing difference across these three languages. As my analysis presents over the next four chapters, this perspective illuminates a range of fundamental tensions that evolve across the governmental history of the Himalayan hills: a tension between the interests and desires of the imperial regimes as they collide with the rugged landscape of the Himalayan hills; a tension between the hierarchically organised diversity that the imperial

landscape employs as a central governmental gaze and the ideal of territorial uniformity that applies to the national regimes that follow; a tension between the supposed unity-in-diversity of the national territories and indigenous claims to difference within them; and finally a tension between global connectivity and local meaning involved in glocal place-making.

### Chapter 3: Paths Through the Landscape

*(...) we need to do more than what social scientists like to call comparison, putting one country next to another, another culture next to another, as if they were as independent in life as in thought. (A. Appadurai, 1993, p. 419)*

In the last chapter, I set out some preliminary steps towards a non-territorial conceptualisation of government and politics. In this chapter I discuss what this entails for the way we practice research. I argue that we need to relax the policing of disciplinary borders and re-consider methodological conventions, in order to re-imagine a study of politics that can simultaneously engage global flows and the continued importance of place.

In its cross-disciplinary approach to politics, the present chapter is situated on the background of critical discussions on the relationship between *place and culture* in anthropology and the relationship between *politics and scale* within geography (Agnew, 1994; Arjun Appadurai, 1996, 2002; Brenner, 1997, 1999; Escobar, 2001; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, 1997a, 1997b; Malkki, 1992; Schendel, 2002).<sup>27</sup> If culture can no longer be expected to be naturally linked to place (if it ever could) then the study of cultural politics cannot rely on merely importing ‘culture’ as a static, place-bound object into discussion of political dynamics. Instead, the production of cultural roots in specific places should be seen as potentially political in itself, and its political consequences and entanglements should be investigated. Similarly, if the ‘scalar fix’ that tied power and politics

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<sup>27</sup> Lisa Wedeen, in a recent article, takes up the related challenge of thinking through what the critical anthropology of the late 80s and 90s – most importantly Clifford & Marcus’ *Writing Culture* (1986) – means for the use of ethnography in political science (see Wedeen, 2010)

tightly to the national scale in the second half of the twentieth century is unravelling, then the ‘methodological territorialism’ of much political science research needs to be revised (Brenner, 1998). Hence, to grasp contemporary political dynamics in the face of both de-territorialisation and place-making we need to revise our understanding of what constitutes relevant objects of study, how these are delineated, and how we might study them. To do so, I argue that bringing relevant insights from imagined disciplinary outsiders into the study of contemporary politics makes a lot of sense.

#### **Places, Cases and Political Locations**

Through well thought-out cross-case comparisons, political science has over the last half century managed to produce a wide range of interesting middle-range propositions about political phenomena (George & Bennett, 2004). In these comparisons, ‘cases’ are often envisioned in spatial terms and positioned in a bureaucratic hierarchy evolving around the nation-state formation (Gerring, 2004). This is one of the places where a ‘methodological territorialism’ tends to seep into the analytical framework (Agnew, 1994; Brenner, 1999). That is, in the comparative case study, national territory is often taken not simply as a temporally finite empirical phenomenon, but as a pre-given analytical category. In parallel, scale is often imagined in terms of concentric circles: ‘the local’, encompassed by ‘the national’, encompassed by ‘the global’. And, when introduced into analytical frameworks, these circles are often further imagined to be situated in a hierarchy indicating directions of effect: global flows undermine the power of the nation-state, national legislation has local effects etc. As noted in the introduction, I initially conceptualised the present study largely along these lines.

However, if we regard space, place, and territory as socially and historically constituted phenomena then the typical, spatial approach to cases and comparison becomes problematic. If national territory is the product of a contingent, albeit highly globalised, governmental gaze then its production emerges as a central *concern* for analysis rather than a pre-given *starting point*. Scales, in other words, cannot be taken as neutral categories of analysis as scale itself is produced along with spaces, places and territories (Brenner, 1997, p. 159; 1998). Neither can we regard scale as necessarily organised in hierarchies. As my analysis illustrates, the production of a uniform national space in Nepal in the mid-twentieth century is e.g. to a large extent contextualised by the local practice of a handful of academics working towards community improvement among the Nepalis in Darjeeling in the beginning of the century. Here, very local events produce an important context for the production of space at an explicitly national scale.<sup>28</sup> Hence, when approaching space, place and territory as human products, a comparison-in-isolation of cases conceived in simple spatial and hierarchical terms is unviable and – given the spatial dynamics I investigate – highly problematic.

This study, therefore, is not a comparative case study in the classic sense. I do not see the spatial scales I engage (e.g. India, West Bengal, Darjeeling) as constituting cases, and I do not regard a comparison between these as the primary objective of research. Rather, what is interesting from the perspective of this study are the multiple ways in which landscape and politics are connected across what we

<sup>28</sup> Appadurai calls this non-hierarchical co-constitution “intercontextuality” (Arjun Appadurai, 1996, p. 187). Lefebvre seems to indicate the same through his “principle of interpenetration and superimposition of social spaces” (Brenner, 1997, pp. 14-145; Goswami, 2004, pp. 27-30; Lefebvre, [1974] 1991, p. 88)

might call ‘political locations’ (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997c, p. 35).<sup>29</sup> By political location I mean a connection between, on the one hand, a specific location and on the other hand, political contestation of e.g. that location’s meaning as a place. While the ‘location’ part naturally ties a ‘political location’ to a specific point on Earth, the ‘political’ part isn’t necessarily tied to location in the same way. Hence, the conceptualisation suggests that we might use the coalescence of an often widespread range of political actions and representations around a specific location as an analytical starting point.

My study deals with four such ‘political locations’ across the India-Nepal borderland and across substantial historical stretches. Firstly, I engage Darjeeling as it is constituted in relation to the distinction between hills and plains across the northern subcontinent, in relation to British imperial connections and imagination of the hill station, and in relation to globalised notions of heritage and tea branding. Secondly, I engage Nepal as it is produced as a uniform national space across the last half century, how this production takes up the imperial history of the Gorkha kingdom, and how governmental differences are overwritten in this production albeit re-emerging in the contemporary imagination of a new Nepal. Thirdly, I engage Gorkhaland as it meets the image of the peaceful hill state, as it feeds upon and feeds into anxieties of being ‘out of place’ among the ‘Indian-Nepalis’, and as it organises spectacles of heavy-handed control in Darjeeling. Finally, I engage Limbuwan as it is positioned as a proper place across academic and political discourse, as it is

<sup>29</sup> Gupta and Ferguson bring up this notion in their reflections on how to rethink fieldwork in a way more attuned to a world where culture not necessarily sits naturally in place (see also Escobar, 2001). I, however, think we might usefully bring this notion out of the disciplinary self-reflection of anthropology and into a wider discussion.



connected to globalised notions of ‘indigeneity’, and as it is enacted as a state-to-be in a new, federal Nepal.

The refusal to rely on conventional territorial scales in the construction of units of analysis does not, however, indicate that these scales are not empirically important. In fact, I would argue that the present study is in a better position to gauge the power of national territorialisation and local place-making *because* it avoids uncritical methodological allegiance with either scale to begin with. Additionally, the historical horizon within which this study operates – stretching from British and Gorkha imperial government, over Nepali and Indian national territorialisation, to contemporary global entanglements – helps place the ‘scalar fix’ of the national order of things in a broader perspective. Hence, in this study, the national scale continues to play a crucial role – not as a natural entity – but as the powerful product of global history related to colonial imperialism and the global spread of capitalism (Goswami, 2002, 2004; Lefebvre, [1974] 1991; Lefebvre, Brenner, & Elden, 2009).<sup>30</sup> Through my engagement with spatial history (see below) the national scale, in other words, emerges as a historically conditioned globalised form (Balibar, 1991; Brenner, 1997, 1999). In my view, such a perspective not only resonates with recent history scholarship (Goswami, 2002, 2004; Ludden, 2003b, 2012), but also helps lift political science research out of the global order in which it was born, without losing sight of that order.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> I do not, by saying this, want to suggest that the nation-state formation was a direct product of capitalist expansion - as Lefebvre might be interpreted to suggest (Balibar, 1991; Deshpande, 1998). Rather, the globalisation of capitalism – in the historical interaction with a range of other factors - brought about some of the grounds on which nation-state formation was enabled. See (Goswami, 2004) for a detailed analysis of such dynamics in the case of the Indian nation-state formation.

<sup>31</sup> A globalised spatial history of nation-state formation furthermore pushes for a critical interrogation of the supposed uniformity of colonial imperialism and the

### **Geographical Sites, Textual Sites, and the Object of Study**

Albeit dealing with ‘political locations’ as units of analysis, the research for this study has, naturally, taken place in more concrete sites. I spent a total of four months in Kathmandu, Delhi, Ilam and Darjeeling over three visits from the autumn of 2010 to the autumn of 2011.<sup>32</sup> I interviewed people and gathered textual material in Kathmandu and Delhi, and I travelled across and conducted fieldwork in the borderland between Eastern Nepal and North Bengal – mainly concentrated on the towns of Ilam and Darjeeling. My time in the field was shared between various forms of participant observation, chatting, informal interviewing and collection of textual material. I undertook a range of interviews with representatives of various ‘ethnic’ and ‘political’ organisations across Kathmandu, Ilam and Darjeeling and participated in an array of public events and speeches. As my focus at the time was more explicitly on national schooling than is expressed in the present study, part of my time was furthermore spent with

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subsequent ‘post-colonial condition’ of former colonies (see e.g. S. Roy, 2007, p. 23). As I argue in the dissertation, colonial rule actually produced a variety of different spaces in the landscape on which the Indian national territory was later instantiated. As a result, the notion of a uniform ‘post-colonial condition’ – evident e.g. in Indian national discourse – overwrites a variety spatially differentiated legacies. The uniformity of colonial imperialism, in other words, seems more like a product of post-colonial nationalist discourse than of colonial administration itself. As I analyse the production of space across a formally ‘post-colonial’ and a formally ‘non-colonised’ nation-state formation as well as local place-making in the Darjeeling area – a somewhat special (post-colonial?) space – the dissertation at least scratches the surface of a critique of uniform post-coloniality illustrating some of the spatial diversity of colonial conditions.

<sup>32</sup> Before initiating the project, I lived and worked in Kathmandu during nine important months of Nepal’s recent political history – from autumn 2007 to summer 2008 when the Constituent Assembly was elected and the country subsequently declared a republic. While this stay predates the conceptualisation of the present project – and thus cannot be really be relied upon for fieldwork material – it did allow me to gain an important familiarity with the region, a basic understanding of the Nepali language, and a good insight into the fundamental political questions that are currently being posed.

participant observations in schools. While not all of the resulting material turned out to be of interest for the subsequently reframed study, the textbooks remain an important site (especially in chapter five).

To these geographical sites of fieldwork, one could add a range of textual sites. One of my early selections was the textual site of school textbooks. This has proved a rich site for investigating the territorialisation of the political landscape and the production of national space. In both countries schools are one of the most widespread institutions of the nation state and have been seen a prime site for the production and negotiation of nationalism (Advani, 1996, 2009; B. K. Banerjee, 2007; Caddell, 2005, 2006, 2007; Guichard, 2009, 2010; Kumar, 1988, 2005; Skinner & Holland, 2009 [1996]).<sup>33</sup> Both countries also have centralised systems determining what students are supposed to read in public schools across the nation.<sup>34</sup> Hence, the textual site of textbooks combines an explicit state focus with a substantial spatial dispersion and a relatively uniformity in content. This site, thus, provides both an insight into the governmental gaze as expressed by the state and a grounded check on scholarly analyses of national discourse and representation. To this, I have added a range of other representational and reflective material: government documents,

<sup>33</sup> A range of scholars furthermore emphasise the school as an important institution for the production of the nation, its people and territory in general (see e.g. Balibar, 1991; Foucault, 1995; Goswami, 2002; Weber, 1976).

<sup>34</sup> The Nepali system is, nonetheless substantially more centralised than the Indian. In Nepal, public school textbooks are written, edited, and even printed centrally before being distributed throughout the country. In India, the states are allowed a certain, limited, freedom in selecting and/or producing textbooks following the centrally prescribed curriculum. West Bengal, however, does not seem to comply with the centrally prescribed standards and the textbooks used in public schools in the state differ substantially from those produced by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

political pamphlets, maps and academic texts providing a multitude of textual encounters.

In sum, my research practice has spanned multiple, diverse sites. What does this multiplicity and diversity mean for the study? I see my research practice somewhat along the lines of George Marcus' classic discussion of a multi-sited ethnography in which:

(...) comparison emerges from putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected sites of investigation (Marcus, 1995, p. 102).

What my engagement with the multiple sites has allowed me to do is to see the political landscape of the Indian-Nepal borderland as an 'emergent object of study'.<sup>35</sup> As such, it ties together the four political locations described above in a complex web of relations. And it straddles an international border that typically bounds research while concomitantly pointing the 'paths out' of the area, its global connections (see Cresswell, 2004, pp. 40-43; Cronon, 1992). While I, naturally, selected the geographical field sites at a relatively early stage, this object of study has emerged through a gradual reflective process. It is only through a repeated 'tacking' (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007; Clifford & Marcus, 1986) between my theoretical propositions and various geographical and textual sites that I have been able to make sense of the area in these terms. Hence, as Marcus suggests, the object

<sup>35</sup> A few articles have already studied dynamics across the border between Eastern Nepal and Darjeeling (Hutt, 1997; Shneiderman, 2010), but the concerted perspective I propose here has not been attempted before.

of such a multi-sited study should itself be seen as a product, as a contribution, of the study.<sup>36</sup>

Why then, is the political landscape of the India-Nepal borderland an interesting object of study? What does the India-Nepal borderland help us see about the connection between landscape and politics? If you look at a ‘political’ map of the area you will clearly see the north-south border that ostensibly separates India and Nepal. One, however, needs not spend much time in the area to realise that this border, as many others, “not only join[s] what is different but also divide[s] what is similar” (Schendel, 2005, p. 9). If you then turn your attention to a topographical map of the area, a very different border emerges. This border follows the ecological line of distinction between the hills and the plains running east-west, perpendicular to the international border. As my study suggests, this border is pretty much invisible for most common approaches to politics (developments in political ecology exempted), yet it plays into politics in various ways across the borderland. In contrast to a classic comparison of territorially conceived units, a focus on the borderland enables an appreciation of

<sup>36</sup> This grounded, improvising (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007) research process directed at an emergent object of study does not follow the principles for case selection within a causal comparative framework. Here, my ‘selection of case’ would surely be cast as a biased selection on the “dependent variable” – a comment I have indeed received a number of times. This critique however follows a different epistemological logic than the one guiding my study in this dissertation. Where classic comparative studies obviously rely on a high degree of abstraction from context through the magic of large numbers (large-N) or more-or-less well founded prior assumptions about the cases (small-N), the study proposed here relies, instead, on a detailed ‘thick’ explication of the context in which the political dynamics unfolds (see e.g. Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, pp. 73-74; Geertz, 1973, pp. 3-30). The value of my study relies on its ability to provide connection between the cases I bring forth, the context in which they are situated (and interact with), and the theoretical propositions that have been produced in the course of the research process. In turn it produces contextually situated rather than abstract knowledge (Haraway, 1988).

these dynamics, along with the powerful effects of the territorial border.

### **Borderland Fieldwork and Situational Analysis**

The borderland provides a rich field site for the investigation of national territorialisation as well as local place making. Placing the periphery of national territory at the centre of attention, the borderland illustrates the everyday operations of territory. At the border, it becomes very tangible what can travel across – openly or illicitly – and what cannot.

When school buses every day bring children from the Nepali border town of Pashupatinagar to attend the supposedly superior schools of the Indian border town Mirik, their everyday route fuses two small localities with the international scale of cross-border travel while supplanting one nationally scaled curriculum for another. And when these children’s fathers walk the small smuggler’s path across the border with Chinese jeans coming from Kathmandu, they are able to do so because eager Indian consumers cannot get these directly from China due to the high politics of international relations between the two massive super-powers. In these, and many other ways, the borderland perspective is necessarily multi-scalar and destabilises the clear-cut borders of the national order of things with the naturalness of everyday life. Hence, as a field site, the borderland provides a novel perspective on scale (Schendel, 2005; Schendel & Abraham, 2005).

Supposedly part of an ancient *Kirat* civilisation, the two borderland sites where I did my fieldwork share history. The area was at various times divided between Sikkim, Bhutan, the Gorkha Empire, the British Raj, Nepal and India. Present histories of the borderland, thus, provide both resources and constraints for the rooting of people in

the area. In a period when notions of indigeneity are attaining global legitimacy, the minute details of borderland history have become the playing field for contemporary politics of place. Questions about who are ‘in place’ and who are ‘out of place’ in the political landscape introduce elements of a history of and before the border into claims directed towards the power-centres of the two nation-states that bisect the borderland. Paradoxically, such claims both destabilise and confirm the territoriality of the two nation-states – asking the national centres for recognition based on histories that are overwritten in national representations. Hence, as the geographical anchoring of political locations, the borderland sites illuminate complex connections between national territorialisation and local place-making.

In my fieldwork in the borderland, I chose to focus on the semi-urban environments of Ilam and Darjeeling. These towns combine the everyday life of the borderland (the border is less than 20 km from either) with the material practices and representations of place and territory that come out of official signposting, political parades, ethnic organisation offices and national schools. Potentially the capitals of future Limbuwan and Gorkhaland states, the towns provide both a concrete geographical anchoring of these territorial claims and a stage on which place-making can be performed. They provide a meeting-point in which the politics of place are staged in front of and within the borderland with its inherently multi-scalar characteristics. Hence, in these borderland towns, politics is rarely just local.

In the present study, I make sense of my fieldwork in two ways. Firstly, I bring in a range of my interviews at a discursive level, considering the ways in which they represent place and landscape. Secondly, I bring in various observations constructed as ‘cases’ as

understood within the Manchester school of social anthropology (M. Burawoy, 1998; see Michael Burawoy, 2009; J. C. Mitchell, 1983). In contrast to the classic comparative case study of political science, ‘cases’ are here characterised more in terms of time and social complexity than in terms of space and bureaucratic hierarchy. Consisting of “a detailed examination of an event (or a series of events)” (J. C. Mitchell, 1983, p. 192) cases can extend anywhere from an ‘apt illustration’ over a ‘situational analyses’ to a longer-term ‘extended case’. Due to the relatively short time-span of my fieldwork, I do not provide any extended observation-based analyses, but I do construct what might be termed both apt illustrations (e.g. the anecdote introducing the study) and situational analysis (e.g. of the public events during the state elections in Darjeeling). The use of these enables me to address more directly the material and practical side of the politics of place and landscape than any purely discourse-based study could (Cerwonka, 2004).

### **Engagements with History**

Places rarely change from one day to another. Neither do landscapes. Hence, looking at history makes sense when seeking to understand the production and change of political landscape. In the present study I deal extensively with history. The political landscape itself is historically founded bringing together ecological conditions, historical alterations and sedimented representations of the landscape. Similarly, attempts to alter the landscape – to produce and situate places such as Limbuwan and Gorkhaland within it – routinely brings history into the on-going politics of place. Furthermore, historical interpretation also runs through the territorialisation of the landscape in the hands of the Indian and Nepali nation-states. Therefore, as it shows up in such

various guises, history provides as a vibrant field for the production of the political landscape. This field, however, is also a methodologically challenging one. Across the three guises described above, history is obviously brought into this study at multiple levels of ontology and interpretation. In the following paragraphs, I outline these levels and the choices involved in my interpretation – in choice of material as well as epistemological approach.

National and indigenous histories obviously have a tendency to project its people and place far back in time (see e.g. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). As such histories are often politically effective they, nonetheless, need to be taken seriously. Although some ‘inventions of tradition’ seem more dubious than others, all histories are, after all, interpretations based on varying degrees of engagement with varying amounts and qualities of sources. In the Himalayan hills, sources can sometimes be very meagre. As one Limbu representative told me, the Nepali paper on which much Limbu historical documents have been written is, unfortunately, excellent for lighting fires and rolling cigarettes. Hence, few historical documents have survived decades of cold winters. This, however, does not mean that the histories that are written are necessarily less important in the contemporary politics of place. As Lisa Wedeen’s study of the Asad cult in Syria reminds us, sometimes even “manifestly incredible” claims can effectively be incorporated into the symbolic universe of national discourse (Wedeen, 1999, p. 12). Repeated and rehearsed, such claims might be incorporated into the repertoire of banal forms of nationalism or indigeneity supporting the rooting of people in specific, bordered and territorialized, landscapes (Billig, 1995; Malkki, 1992).

In this study, I nonetheless try to situate both national and indigenous historical claims against a background of what might be called ‘spatial history’. Where national and indigenous histories typically read history backwards from the positions of a present place, the ‘spatial history’ instead seeks to clarify the ways in which this place has emerged along with the political landscape into which it is fitted. As Paul Carter suggests in the introduction to his spatial history of Australia, such an approach is “concerned with the haze which preceded clear outlines” and “recognizes that the spatiality of historical experience evaporates before the imperial gaze” – that is, the gaze of established, cause-and-effect histories supporting certain regimes (Carter, 1987, p. xxii). Hence, more than a history of origins, it is a history of beginnings and transformations – a history of the cultural production of landscapes, or broad canvases of space and place. It is, in other words, a history of the delineation, naming, bordering, organization and representation of space into the form of places, landscapes and territories.

In the present study, I seek to bring out ‘spatial histories’ of Nepal as a national territory and of the Darjeeling hills as a place. To do so, I apply two connected interpretive tactics. Both of these can be seen as minor alternatives to the strategy of writing a full-blown spatial history (e.g. along the lines of (Carter, 1987)) – a project fully outside the scope of the present dissertation as well as my field of expertise.

In the first tactic, I apply a critical reading of existing, ‘national’ or ‘indigenous’, historical narratives in terms of their effects on territorialisation, place-making and the production of the political landscape. This reading involves not so much a critique of the veracity of the truth claims in these historical narratives as an explication of

their contingency and the powerful effects they have notwithstanding their truthfulness. In this reading I, in other words, foreground what the historical narratives *do*, rather than what the veracity of their claims might be – emphasising how the narratives make places and territories more real and inevitable in the political landscape. While relying on existing historical scholarship for the histories I analyse within this tactic, my engagement with school textbooks furthermore allows me to interpret the historical articulations and gauge the spread of these histories – providing a check on the scholarly literature. Chapter five, on the spatial history of Nepal, illustrates the most consistent use of this tactic.

In the second tactic, I try to provide an ‘outside’ to the dominant historical narratives. I do so mainly through a synthetic reading of existing historical scholarship, at crucial points supplemented with a limited engagement with primary sources. Chapter seven, on hills, hill stations and Darjeeling in the history of India mainly illustrates the use of this tactic. In this history, I foreground the physical landscape and its representations and insist on pointing out how specific parts of this landscape – in this case the hills – have been placed outside the main narratives of national history. Here, I approach a critique of national history more from the outside than from the inside, through a decentred view that places the national periphery at the centre of attention. This again enables the explication of contingency and a focus on how some places – such as Darjeeling – might fall between lines of national spatial classification. Like the first tactic, it thus allows for an appreciation of the involved in the production and territorialisation of the political landscape.

In summary, one might distinguish three ontological or interpretive levels at which history enters the present study. As a basis for the analysis, I bring in a range of historical conditions and events that are taken as positive facts. These are conditions that seem to be surrounded by widespread agreement in the literature and which are outside the scope of the present project to critically engage. The Gorkha-British war in 1814-15 and the ensuing Treaty of Sugauli are an example of this level. At a second level, I bring in various histories that I refer to as ‘national’, ‘colonial’ or ‘indigenous’. Some of these contain ‘facts’ that can obviously be questioned, but I only do so to a limited degree. For these histories, their articulation and dissemination are of more interest to this study than their veracity. I approach them at a level of representation where their discursive and visual constellation and its effects on the production of place and landscape are more relevant than their truth claims. At a third level, I bring in what we might call ‘outside’ histories or counter-histories. The merit of these for the dissertation lies in a combination of their truthfulness and their critical or decentering potential. Obviously, some histories appear at several of these levels at different points in the study.

#### **A Note on Limitations**

With the focus on space, place and social landscape, there are a number of perspectives that I do not address in the present study. With my focus on the political landscape of the India-Nepal borderland I do not address a number of the ‘social wholes’ that many studies often take as their object (see e.g. Binsbergen, 1981; Gellner, 2012). Albeit my study deals extensively with claims raised in terms of ‘ethnicity’, I do not take any specific ethnic group as a unit of study. As described above, my interest in the indigenous rooting of people in specific physical

landscapes relates mainly to the places that are produced as meaningful and important in the process, not the people. My main focus is thus e.g. on Limbuwan and not on the Limbus – although such categories of identity and place are obviously intertwined in the social processes of rooting. Similarly, I do not deal with questions of religion or caste in any concerted way. In addition, although I acknowledge the high political salience of questions of gender in the area as well as in parts of the literature of nationalism (Yuval-Davis, 1997), I do not address these questions explicitly in the study. While gender relations obviously plays an important role in the organisation of many societies into e.g. ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces, questions of gender seem less relevant in relation to the scales at which I approach place and territory (however see Massey, 1994).<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, with a focus on large-scale practices and widespread representations, I do not extensively deal with personal imaginations of place and political landscape. While such a study would obviously be interesting, it would involve a very different kind of material (e.g. gained through much longer term fieldwork) and interpretive framework (more attuned to how people produce meaning at a personal level). While I do provide some minor observations in this direction in order to ground the study in the lived realities of the areas I investigate, my main level of investigation nonetheless remains that of more-or-less organised representation. Though necessary in terms of focusing the study, this of course limits my ability to provide knowledge claims related to the relationship between organisational

<sup>37</sup> Similarly, while claims to indigeneity in the area are obviously and interestingly represented as inscribed particularly on the female body (widespread Limbu beauty-contests are a case in point of this), I do not take up such connections as they do not seem to be implicated in the production of political landscapes in the sense I am after.

representations (e.g. of Gorkhaland) and personal imagination (e.g. that of people living in ‘Gorkhaland’).

Finally, a note on language: English and Nepali are the official and prevalent languages across my sites of investigation. Many of the ‘ethnic’ and ‘political’ elites I interviewed gladly spoke to me in English and some even preferred to do so, the centralised school textbooks and government documents that I analyse are for the most part published in English<sup>38</sup>, and much formal political discussions are partly conducted in English-language media. During my fieldwork in Kathmandu, Ilam and Darjeeling, a Nepali friend assisted me with language. He translated during interviews with non-English speakers, helped out with subsequent transcriptions and answered a barrage of questions about signs, pamphlets, informal comments, public speeches etc. that were linguistically inaccessible to me. My rudimentary knowledge of Nepali helped me ask questions in a variety of situations of uncertainty, but it was not sufficient to allow me to do independent interviews or translations. In sum, while the present study might not give an adequate picture of Nepali-language discourse, it should nonetheless give a substantial account of vernacular politics.

### **Interpretation and Situated Knowledge**

As I have argued throughout this chapter, taking place as a socially constituted phenomenon rather than a pre-given analytical category has major implications for our knowledge production. It firstly involves working with and towards an emergent object of study. In this study I have come to conceptualise this object as the political landscape of the India-Nepal borderland and I have approached it analytically through

<sup>38</sup> Of the textbooks I analyse, only the Nepali textbooks from the late 80’s are in Nepali. Parts of these were translated for me.

four ‘political locations’. Secondly, it will often involve a multi-sited research practice. In this study, I have analysed material from various geographical and textual sites in order to enable the construction of a research object that was not pre-given. Thirdly, this study has involved both ethnographically and historically oriented research practices. As places and landscapes are constructed over substantial stretches of time and their construction involves not only discursive and visual representation, but also material practices these practices have been essential for uncovering historical and material connections between landscape and politics.

Finally, taking place seriously involves interpretation throughout the research process. As the production and politics of place and landscape rely on local and trans-local, historical and contemporary networks of meaning, the knowledge claims that I produce through the interpretation of representations and practices are necessarily contextually situated (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007; Haraway, 1988). In order to produce such knowledge, procedures are necessarily flexible and improvisational and thus do not lend themselves to standardization (Malkki, 2007). Hence, the ‘embedded objectivity’ of situated knowledge cannot be evaluated solely in procedural terms (M. Burawoy, 1998), but has rather to be judged on the basis of contextual resonance. In the present study, I seek to make my contextual interpretations open to the reader not only through a general explication of what I see as the relevant context, but also through the design itself. As the production of the places I investigate provides important and interpenetrating contexts for each other, what is explicated in one analytical chapter is often part of the interpretive context for another. Hence, by the final chapter, the interpretive context will hopefully be

clear enough for the reader to relate to the interpretive claims I put forward throughout the study.



## Chapter 4: Imperial Landscapes

*A great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there – despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders. (Desai, 2006, p. 9)*

*The effect of these notifications has been to place the plains of Assam in much the same legal position as other parts of India. The inhabitants of the hilly tracts, however, were not yet suited for the elaborate legal rules (...) and they had to be governed in a simpler and more personal manner than those of the more civilized and longer-settled districts. (Gait, 1906, p. 330)*

“What democracy you have in Nepal, you made an Indian president!” the keeper of the bookstore told Narayan. This was not the first time he had gotten this sort of half joking, half baffled comment while assisting me during my fieldwork in Darjeeling. As a ‘Nepalese Nepali’ among the ‘Indian Nepalīs’ of Darjeeling, my friend easily attracted such off-the-cuff evaluations of the political changes taking place across the border. The “Indian president” in question was Ram Baran Yadav, the president of Nepal since its official declaration as Republic in 2008. For Darjeeling residents, such as the keeper of the bookstore, Yadav’s supposed Indianness obviously stems from his origin in Nepal’s southern plains. To them, Yadav’s Nepali citizenship, his mainstream political career in the Nepali Congress Party or his earlier ministerial positions did not matter, it seemed. The president’s loyalties were seen as determined by his originating landscape. And notwithstanding the eager commentators’ own Indian citizenships, and everyday life in a North Indian town, the “Indian” loyalties of the Nepali president seemed to offend their political sensibilities. What was this plains-

dweller doing now heading the former “Himalayan kingdom” across the border?

Narayan’s repeated encounters with such comments illustrate a tension between the bordered national territories of India and Nepal and a cross-border normative landscape. In these encounters, the national order of things unravels for a moment providing a glimpse of an underlying landscape. This landscape, I argue, draws lines back into the imperial history of the area, lines that are increasingly resurfacing in the contemporary politics of local autonomy.

In 1991, Etienne Balibar stated that all nations are born out of empire (Balibar, 1991). This is definitely true for India and Nepal. Initially there were the empires of the Indian plains and the Tibetan plateau. In between these, the Himalayas and their foothills constituted an area that was relatively impenetrable by the governmental gaze of imperial formations. For some, this space represented the uncivilised and savage. For others it provided a zone of refuge from the imperial exploitation on either side. Over time, however, empire was superimposed even upon the challenging terrain of the Himalayan hills. In the mid-eighteenth century, Prithvi Narayan Shah expanded the Gorkha empire eastwards across the hills subduing dozens of small polities. Around the turn of the century, this empire stretched all the way across the central Himalayas from the river Sutlej in present-day Himachal Pradesh, to the Teesta river separating the Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of present-day West Bengal. Only a decade later the Anglo-Gorkha war stopped the Gorkha expansion and the British extended their colonial government into the Himalayan hills first around Darjeeling and later further east. What used to be a zone of refuge from imperial expansion had thus, by the mid-nineteenth

century, been superimposed by empire. Migrants escaping the feudal exploitation of the Gorkha Empire ended up in relations of capitalist exploitation within the British. These migrants might be distant relatives of the Darjeeling residents that presented Narayan with their comments on the “Indian” president of Nepal.

In this chapter I lay out a broad, sweeping history of the imperial government of the Himalayan hills. I describe how, within both the British and the Gorkha imperial formations, essential and hierarchical differentiations of people emerged as a way to govern the difficult terrain at a distance. Under the British, the racial differentiation between the plains- and hill-dwellers provided a governmental gaze in which, as Edward Gait (a British administrator stationed in Assam) suggests above, the ‘normal’ rule of the plains was distinguished from a “simpler” government at a distance supposedly more suited for the hills. In parallel, the Gorkha Empire’s extension of government across the hills was facilitated by an equally essentialised differentiation of castes following a Hindu hierarchy of purity and pollution. In turn, these lines of difference provided the imperial landscapes upon which a gradual territorial integration was brought about. In independent India, the “backward village” of the plains provided a model for uniform territorial representation as India was incorporated into the globalized project of post-war development – excluding the north-eastern hills. And in Nepal, the hierarchical division of people continued below the superficial unity of the world’s last Hindu kingdom.

#### **Civilised Plains and Savage Hills**

In a detailed historical study of environment and ethnicity in India, Sumit Guha argues that, already when “agrarian settlement in the great river valleys began to elaborate the outlines of a sub-continental

political and cultural system during the first millennium CE” differentiation along ecological lines occurred. This differentiation was

(...) socio-cultural as well as technological, and the communities of the riverine plains, the forest, the savannah, the desert and the high mountains co-evolved in continuous interaction involving both conflict and cooperation over the next two millennia. (S. Guha, 1999, p. 26)

As ecological niches such as the hills and forests functioned as “both a base and refuge” they enabled the distinct developments of their inhabitants providing the grounds for a crucial contrasts “between the civilised and their domesticated landscape, and the savages in their wild woods” (S. Guha, 1999, pp. 26, 199; see also Scott, 2009). In other words, practices of sedentary settlement, on the one hand, and shifting cultivation, slash-and-burn, hunting and gathering, on the other, gradually became contrasting markers for the identification of people and places.

At first, this ecologically based line of distinction was, nonetheless, relatively permeable. The relations between the inhabitants were, according to Guha, “characterised by a mixture of continually varying proportions between predation and production, tribute and trade, and changes in this mix affected, and were affected by, the advances and retreats of the forest and the sown” (S. Guha, 1999, p. 200). More of a frontier than a border, the ecological line of distinction engendered exchange and interaction. In the north eastern subcontinent, Sanjib Baruah further argues that, under the pre-colonial Ahom government, “most peasants did some amount of shifting cultivation”. Hence, the

common perception that only ‘tribal’ peasants were shifting cultivators while what we would now call the ethnic Assamese –

both Hindu and Muslim – peasants were settled cultivators (...) had little foundation in the reality of agricultural practices (Baruah, 2005, p. 89).

In other words, while the ecological lines of distinction were there in relation to place, they did not necessarily translate into solid distinctions between people.

This pattern, however, began to shift dramatically over the last century of colonial rule. After the rebellion in 1857, the British economic philosophy changed bringing about a new conception of colonial space in relation to economic development. This change was to have important consequences both for the physical landscape of the subcontinent and its political representation. In her recent book *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (2004), Manu Goswami describes this change as a shift from ‘mercantile’ to ‘territorial’ colonialism. Formerly regarded as an external territory for extraction, “the new imperial episteme (...) placed colonial spaces within rather than outside the larger British-imperial whole” (Goswami, 2004, p. 44). Providing a “spatial fix” to British economic development, this change made India a landscape for rapidly increasing investment, a space that could be developed through public and private intervention. In the new governmental gaze of the colonisers, the subcontinent became an area that held the promise of major economic development if provided with due investment in agriculture, infrastructure etc. (Goswami, 2004). A South Asian development regime, that was to stretch across colonial and post-colonial government, emerged (Ludden, 1992, 2005a).

With the change towards ‘territorial’ colonialism, major investments followed substantially altering the Indian landscape: Railroads were laid down at a rapid pace, large-scale irrigation works

undertaken, and tea plantation picking up speed (Bhattacharya, 2012; Gadgil & Guha, 1993; Goswami, 2002, pp. 46-52, 103-131). Seen as having a ‘magical’ ability to annihilate distance, provide material welfare, discipline, modernise and “tame entrenched prejudices”, railways were “the most privileged of all ‘state works’” and from 1860 to 1920 the pace of railway construction in British India “far exceeded that of Britain and France” (Goswami, 2004, pp. 47, 51, 105). In parallel with the railway constructions, “colonial officials were driven by a desire to improve landscapes and modernise agrarian spaces, even as they sought to maximise revenue returns” (Bhattacharya, 2012, p. 1). In the pastoral highlands of Punjab major irrigation canals and model villages for agrarian settlement were thought out and constructed in the same period. And in the Darjeeling area, the number of tea gardens rose from 39 in 1866 to 113 in 1874 while the outturn of tea exploded from 433,000 lb. to 3,928,000 lb. in the same period (Griffiths, 1967, p. 85).<sup>39</sup>

Under the new colonial developmentalism, the political economy of the hills and plains was “profoundly modified” (S. Guha, 1999, p. 200). Firstly, the link between the environment of the forests and hills, on the one hand, and ‘tribal’ ethnicity or race, on the other, was solidified in the colonial era. While the line of ecological distinction between the hills and the plains had earlier had the character of a soft frontier of exchange and migration, colonial anthropological surveying and census operation gradually turned this frontier into a hard border between essentially different people or races (Baruah, 1999, pp. 28-38;

<sup>39</sup> Over the next three decades, the development continued leaving 148 gardens with a production of 12,447,000 lb. of tea in 1905 (O'Malley, 1907, p. 94).

Cohn, 1987b, 1996).<sup>40</sup> Increasing interest in geology, social Darwinism and anthropometry and the ways these new forms of knowledge were tested and developed in the context of the British Raj combined “to create a stereotype of the forest folk that was to have a powerful effect on society and politics in India down to the present” (see also Dirks, 2001; S. Guha, 1999, p. 19). Seen either as economically and civilisationally backward or intimately connected to pristine nature, the hills and their inhabitants were cast as essentially different from the civilised and settled plains and its peasants.

Secondly, the colonial visions of agrarian development resonated with a fundamental idea that settled cultivation was more civilised than other forms of subsistence. Across a range of legal land settlements, the British administration encouraged long-term tenure seen as a tool to promote more ‘civilised’ forms of agricultural development (Baruah, 2005, pp. 83-97; Ranajit Guha, 1963). Longer tenures were regarded as a prerequisite for a better use of the land (Moore, 1966). While not always well received, this push towards increased sedentary settlement of people also transformed the landscape (Baruah, 2005, pp. 83-97; Bhattacharya, 2012). As Guha argues:

The model of village-centred peasant agriculture – long more ideal than real – was finally realised under colonial auspices in the backwash of the Industrial Revolution. Except on the north-eastern and north-western boundaries of the empire, forest lords had to fit into this pattern or be hunted down; the woodlands, meanwhile retreated inexorably before axe and plough (S. Guha, 1999, p. 200).

<sup>40</sup> See (Masani, 1940, pp. 9-10) for an example of the continuation of the intimate connection between people and places in a textbook used extensively after independence.

As I argue in chapter seven, this process fed into the production of a distinct normative landscape across late colonial and post-colonial India – a framework of belonging, identity, and difference that posed a distinct landscape and a distinct form of settlement in this landscape as the norm. Across ‘territorial colonialism’ and post-colonial developmentalism, this normative landscape was largely shaped in the image of the settled agrarian village of the plains and thus excluded the ‘wild’ hills of the north east as well as the more ‘ruly’ hills of Darjeeling. (cf. Inden, 2000, pp. 131-157; Ludden, 1993).

### **Governing the Himalayan Hills: The Gorkha Empire**

While the plains of the Indian subcontinent have thus provided the physical landscape for various empires for several millennia, imperial formation came much later to the hills and mountains of the Himalayas. Larger-scale settlement came to the valleys of the western Himalayas with the migration of Aryan ‘Khas’ nomads into the area around 1500 B.C. The Khas later continued their eastward migration, and the Gorkhas – who eventually brought about the first larger imperial formation across the central Himalayas – are believed to be of Khas origin. In the eastern Himalayas, the little archaeological and linguistic evidence that exist suggests that migrants of Tibeto-Burman origin settled there around 1000 B.C. These people might have been evading the consolidation of the Han Empire in southwest China (English, 1985, p. 65). Referred to as ‘Kirata’ by ancient Sanskrit sources, the opaque story of these people provides a reference point for present-day claims to a common civilizational history among various ‘Kirant’ groups (Limbus, Rais, Sunuwars, Yakkhas) across the eastern Himalayas (Schlemmer, 2003/2004, 2010). However, when they first arrived, the narrow river valleys and hills of the eastern Himalayas

provided for an even more fragmented form of settlement than in the west. Due to the enormous ‘friction’ of the physical landscape (cf. Scott, 2009), it was not until the Gorkha conquest in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that imperial formation came to the central Himalayas.

Over the second half of the eighteenth century, the Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors managed to conquer an impressive stretch of the Himalayan foothills and adjacent plains. In 1742 Shah ascended to the throne of the relatively small kingdom of Gorkha situated in the hills some fifty kilometres west of Kathmandu valley. Until his death in 1775, he managed to extend the kingdom eastwards conquering the three Malla kingdoms of Kathmandu valley, subjugating the Sen Empire, and placing the areas known as near, middle and far Kirat under various degrees of suzerainty. After Prithvi Narayan Shah’s death, his successors continued the expansion of the Gorkha Empire conquering the ‘twenty-two’ and ‘twenty-four’ kingdoms of central and western Nepal as well as areas east of the present-day border to India.<sup>41</sup> By the turn of the century, the Gorkha Empire extended from the river Sutlej in present-day Himachal Pradesh to the river Teesta in the Darjeeling district of present-day West Bengal – a large area sometimes referred to as Greater Nepal. However, in 1814-1815, confrontations with the British East India Company finally blocked the Gorkha conquests. With the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Sugauli (1816), the Gorkha Empire was reduced at its western, southern and eastern borders and by the mid-nineteenth century the territorial borders of the empire resembled those of present-day Nepal.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> For a good mapped depiction of the Gorkha conquests see (Gurung, 2006, p. 7), for historical narratives see (K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991]; Shaha, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> After the Sugauli Treaty, the territorial extension of the Empire was, in fact, slightly smaller than present-day Nepal. However, following the Gurkha assistance to the British during the 1857 Sepoy

The fact that Shah and his successors were able to conquer vast areas across the Himalayan hills did, however, not mean that the government of the area was an easy task. Potential opposition from the British East India Company was initially limited due to the efficient natural protection of the impenetrable jungles in the southern foothills. The British had come to experience this in 1767 during a ‘disastrous campaign’ where they had sought to rescue the kings of Kathmandu valley from the expanding Gorkhas (Bell, 2012; English, 1985, p. 62). However, even without the major external opposition of the British until the second decade of the nineteenth century, internal government must have been a massive challenge due to the challenging geography and great social diversity of the empire. Especially in the east, the narrow river valleys running north-south and separated by steep hills must have been a major challenge for an empire traversing the Himalayas.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Shah family ruled the empire. However, in 1846 the royal minister Jang Bahadur Rana organized a successful coup and institutionalised a complex hereditary system of ‘prime ministers’ (*shree tin*) that effectively – though not officially – put the royal family out of power until the mid-twentieth century (cf e.g. Whelpton, 2005, pp. 46-85). Under the Rana family, various governmental initiatives provided for a more unified governmental gaze than had, most likely, been the case before. Importantly for the later national territorialisation of the empire, these initiatives de-territorialised earlier categories of difference in a unified hierarchy. Analysing pre-Panchayat governmental discourse, Richard Burghart (1984) argues that the empire initially consisted of three

rebellion, some lands in the southern lowland belt were returned to the Gorkha Empire (from Oudh) giving it roughly the present boundaries (cf. e.g. Gurung, 2006, p. 9).

separate but overlapping spheres: the ‘possessions’ of the king that designated the people and areas paying taxes to the empire; the ‘spiritual realm’ in which the king “exercised his ritual authority”; and the ‘countries of different people’ that were made part of the Gorkha kingdom during the conquest (Burghart, 1984, pp. 104-106). Under the Ranas these spheres gradually merged.

Before the 1814 war with the British East India Company, the frontier of the Gorkha Empire had not had the character of a fixed border. Various feudal landlords in the frontier areas of the empire tactically shifted their allegiance back and forth between Gorkha, British, and Mughal overlords depending on the conditions of taxation etc. (Michael, 1999, 2011). With their shifts, the extension of the empire in terms of ‘possessions’ changed similarly. At the same time, the ‘spiritual realm’ of the Gorkha kings referred to a range of religious places both within and outside those possessions. With the war in 1814, these two spheres of the Gorkha Empire were, however, largely forced into co-extension along the lines of the more stable border designated by the Sugauli Treaty (Burghart, 1984, pp. 114-115). Later, towards the middle of the century, the spiritual and territorial aspects of the empire were further integrated. As the British had emerged as the rulers of most of the subcontinent, the Gorkha Empire could now be represented as “the only remaining Hindustan” (Burghart, 1984, p. 116). Merging the spiritual and territorial spheres, the image of the empire as the last truly Hindu polity on the subcontinent emerged as a central proto-national representation of the country.

In line with the designation of the country as the last Hindustan, the shifting governmental gaze placed the ‘countries of different people’ into a common caste system inspired by the Hindu Varna

system in India. Earlier, these ‘countries’ designated “a unique people who experience a common moral and natural identity by virtue of their living and interacting in the same region” (Burghart, 1984, p. 106). With the introduction of the 1854 civil code (*Muluki Ain*), this territorialised form of differentiation changed. Providing a unified and de-territorialized framework for governing the population, the civil code roughly divided the population into five caste groups (Höfer, 2004; R. Pradhan, 2002; P. R. Sharma, 1977). At the top of the hierarchy were the high-caste, Hindu, ‘cord-wearing’ *Brahmins* and *Chettris*.<sup>43</sup> Below these, most of the former ‘countries of different people’ (*desh*) were tuned into ‘sub-castes’ (*jat*) under two caste groups of ‘non-enslavable’ and ‘enslaveable alcohol-drinkers’ (*matwali*). The Limbus, whose current politics of place we engage in chapter six, were placed in this *matwali* caste, along with a large number of other (typically Tibeto-Burman) ‘indigenous’ groups. At the bottom of the hierarchy came the ‘impure’ but ‘touchable’ Europeans, Muslims and some service castes and finally the ‘untouchables’.

In summary, the shifts in the governmental gaze during the century of Rana rule provided important groundwork for the production of an integrated territory. The emerging governmental identity of the country as a last Hindu polity on the subcontinent attached a certain uniform meaning to the conquered area. And the corresponding de-territorialisation of internal differences into the language of the Hindu caste hierarchy facilitated centralised government and enabled the production of a spatially more uniform, and bordered territory. This is not intended to suggest that the differences between people diminished

<sup>43</sup> While the correct Nepali names would be *Bahun* and *Chettri* (variously spelled) conferring to the Indian *Brahmin* and *Ksatriya* (variously spelled), I have chosen to reflect the typical present-day usage in Nepal of Brahmin and Chettri together.

under the Ranas. The 1854 Civil Code basically provided a legal framework that institutionalised massive inequalities between those at the top of the caste hierarchy and those in the bottom (Höfer, 2004) – an institutionalised hierarchy that was only formally abolished in 1963 and continues to be felt today. Rather than abandon differences, the Civil Code divorced differences from the physical landscape of the empire. In other words, it situated the hierarchical differentiation of people as a way to govern a challenging landscape. In the governmental gaze of the time, this provided an ostensibly more uniform space across which to govern.

#### **Governing the Borderland: Darjeeling and *Pallo Kirat***

Between the eastward expansion of the Gorkha Empire and the subsequent British expansion north from Calcutta and into the Himalayan foothills, the complex governmental history of my area of interest emerges. As the Gorkha's extended their governmental gaze, the hills stretching eastwards from Kathmandu were designated as *Wallo, Manj, and Pallo Kirat* – the near, middle and far areas of Kirat.<sup>44</sup> Using the Sanskrit exonym, the conquered Limbuwan in the easternmost part of the area were *Pallo Kirat*, the area furthest from the governmental centre – initially governed very much at a distance.

<sup>44</sup> Most historical scholarship seem to attribute the name to the Sanskrit *Kirata* used by the plains empires to broadly designate the savage hill-dwellers of the north-eastern subcontinent. Current discourse in Nepal and Darjeeling – especially among the *Kirat* ethnic organisations – however refer to *Kirat* or *Kirati* as a term describing a more coherent civilisation typically taken to encompass the Limbu, Rai, Sunuwar and Yakkha ethnic groups (see e.g. Schlemmer, 2010; T. B. Subba, 1999). There are however differences among these groups in how they approach the concept. While the Rais e.g. have been pushing for an overall *Kirat* state within a new federal Nepal encompassing a large part of eastern Nepal, my Limbu informants presented *Kirat* as too broad a category to build local government upon. One even emphasised that *Kirat* was essentially an Aryan exonym designating a savage and destructive group and thus full of connotations with historical marginalisation.

When the British, half a century later, took over Darjeeling from Sikkim, this area similarly emerged as 'excluded' from the more integrated government of the plains to the south. It, instead, emerged as a colonial hill station and a 'planter's paradise' where commercial endeavours in the tea industry were less regulated than e.g. in neighbouring Assam. Both areas were thus, in one sense or another, excluded from detailed centralised government and only were gradually incorporated into the governmental gaze of the time.

The area comprised by the present district of Darjeeling<sup>45</sup> has a long and complex history of shifting territorial domination. Before the Gorkha conquest in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the area was, most likely, under the shifting influence of the Sikkim and Bhutan kingdoms. According to Limbu history, at this time the hills west of the river Teesta were part of an ancient Limbuwan stretching across from present-day eastern Nepal. Then, in late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Gorkha emperors subjugated the Limbus in eastern Nepal and subsequently clashed with the Sikkimese in the Darjeeling area. Over the next couple of decades, the British East India Company however grew increasingly wary of the Gorkha expansion and potential monopolisation of trade with Tibet. In 1814 this led to the Anglo-Gorkha war fought on the western and southern flanks of the Gorkha empire. The eventual victory of the British was formalised in the Sugauli Treaty the following year. According to this, the Gorkha kingdom lost substantial areas of land including the Darjeeling hills and lowland between the Mechi and Teesta rivers (Samanta, 2000, p. 194). In 1817, the Darjeeling area was returned to the king of Sikkim by the treaty of Tatalya.

<sup>45</sup> Including the Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseon, and Siliguri subdivisions.

Nonetheless, by 1835 the East India Company returned somehow convincing the king of Sikkim to grant them Darjeeling and the immediate surroundings in lease for the construction of a sanatorium in the cool climate of the hills. This is where the story of Darjeeling town as a colonial hill station begins. As such, Darjeeling quickly became a hub for scientific explorations into the Himalayas attracting a range of characters. In 1849 one of these, Joseph Dalton Hooker, led an exploration into Sikkim accompanied by the superintendent of Darjeeling Archibald Campbell. Their intrusions provoked the Sikkimese king who caught and imprisoned them. The ensuing conflict between Sikkim and the Company, led not only to their release, but also to a full annexation of the area surrounding Darjeeling by the British. From a small tract of leased land, the area had now become a part of the Bengal Presidency – and a growing one. By 1865, following a war with Bhutan, the eastern part of the area (Kalimpong and Dooars) was also annexed by the British and made part of a Darjeeling district that now roughly resembled the present.

Under British rule, the Darjeeling district was, however, never treated as a regular district of Bengal. From 1864 it served as the summer capital of the Bengal presidency, and its political relation to the rest of the presidency was mediated by its role as a ‘tea planter’s paradise’. As the tea industry rapidly developed in the second half of the nineteenth century and quickly accounted for a large share of the imperial profits from Bengal, the planters were allowed a less regulated form of rule. Hence, until 1874, the area was considered ‘Non-Regulated’,<sup>46</sup> it was a ‘Scheduled District’ 1874-1919, a ‘Backward

<sup>46</sup> Khawas differs from this, describing the district as a ‘Regulated Area’ in the period between 1861 and 1870. (Khawas, 2003, p. 4).

Tract’ 1919-1935 and a ‘Partially Excluded Area’ under the Government of India Act 1935-1947 (T. B. Subba, 1992, p. 36) – all of which meant exclusion from the general rules of the Raj (Sonntag, 1999). Overall, the area however continued to be wedded to Bengal. Even during the division of Bengal between 1905 and 1912, it remained a small north-eastern outcrop of (west) Bengal. As illustrated in chapter seven, this role as a somewhat excluded periphery of Bengal had crucial consequences for Darjeeling’s position in the territorialised political landscape of independent India.

A somewhat similar history of government at distance can be outlined for the areas on the western side of the 1814 border. Due to a relative dearth of historical sources and potentially large local variations, interpretations of the exact historical trajectories of governmental relations between the Gorkha Rulers and *Pallo Kirat* differ substantially (Caplan, 1991, 2000; Forbes, 1996; K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991]; Sagant, 1996). Nonetheless, across variations in pace and timing, there is substantial agreement on some overall historical developments. Firstly, in the period between 1774 and 1950 there has been a gradual agricultural settlement of eastern Nepal, that is, a major development from rotational, slash-and-burn cultivation combined with hunting and gathering towards more settled cultivation in terraced fields. Secondly, this agricultural shift seems to have combined with population growth and (state-encouraged) in-migration of Hindu peasants creating a shift from the initial labour scarcity to land scarcity. Thirdly, across the period we also see a spatially uneven but gradual unfolding penetration of state administration into the eastern areas. Traditional *kipat* land tenures are gradually turned into centrally governed *raikar* tenures and centralised state authority is gradually



super-imposed through various relations of conflict and collusion between the central government and local headmen.<sup>47</sup> Finally, due to a combination of the above developments with capitalist endeavours outside the area, the period is also characterised by large-scale emigration, first to Darjeeling and the North-East, later to the Nepali plains and further abroad.

Initially, the government of *Pallo Kirat* seems to have been a very broad sort of government at distance. As Sagant notes, during the conquest, “fighting between Gurkhas [sic] and Limbus seem to have been severe” (Sagant, 1996, p. 320). Hence, when the Limbus finally surrendered, they were incorporated into the Gorkha empire through arrangements that grated them a substantial measure of local autonomy. The traditional Limbu headmen were allowed to keep their privileged positions as long as they collected taxes for the new overlords, and the taxes they collected were based on the *kipat* system of land tenure that provided a light taxation of people rather than land. The oath instituting this agreement between the Limbus and Gorkhas “was restated during each regime following that of Prithvi Narayan Shah” (Forbes, 1996). However, this symbolic repetition did not preclude a gradual penetration of centralised government into *Pallo Kirat* and over the Limbus. Although the civil code of 1856 mentioned above did not have much to say about the Limbus, it did shift the governmental gaze somewhat from a focus on *Pallo Kirat* as a ‘country’ to a focus on Limbus as ‘enslaveable alcohol drinkers’ in the Hindu caste system (Höfer, 2004, pp. 117-119). Concomitantly, the various roles of the Limbu headmen were gradually undermined by extension of

<sup>47</sup> As I analyse in detail in chapter six, the tenure system Kipat has today emerged as the main lens through which the government of the eastern borderland of the Gorkha empire has been viewed.

centralised governmental institutions. Hence, “far” Kirat over time moved substantially closer to the governmental centre.

### **The Borderlanders: Migration, State Evasion, and Anxious Belonging**

We will now turn our attention towards the people of the borderland and their government. Tacit, tactical movements across the border have been a salient feature of the history of the Himalayan borderland. The early history of imperial relations between the Gorkhas and the British in the hills of northern India were largely determined by the political economy of land, labour and trade at the time (Michael, 2011). Supposedly, one of Prithvi Narayan Shah’s main motivations for the conquest across the Himalayan hills, was the monopolisation of trade with Tibet – regarded as highly attractive by the British East India Company (K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991]). Conquering the eastern hills controlled by Sikkim and Bhutan was a crucial part in this objective as two of the main passes across the Himalayas into Tibet run through this area. However, as the British checked this expansion in 1814 and the Darjeeling area was seceded to the British in 1816, other motivations took over. At this time, land was abundant in the hills when compared to the amount of people available to till it and, consequently, to tax and conscribe for military service or corvée labour etc. (K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], pp. 212-213). As a consequence, once the territorial boundaries of the two empires were forcefully established, an inter-imperial politics of attracting manpower emerged.

In this historic constellation of land, labour and imperial authority, large groups of residents in the Gorkha-British borderland tactically migrated across the newly established border (Michael, 1999, 2011). Already when Limbuwan was subjugated in the late eighteenth century, large groups of Limbus had fled east into the areas controlled

by Sikkim. After the conquest, the Gorkha rulers repeatedly appealed to these groups to return and “till the land of their forefathers” without any repercussions (Chemjong, 2003; K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], p. 151). However, as the British began to build up Darjeeling from the mid-1830s many more borderlanders migrated eastwards. From the beginning, attracting people from the surrounding hills for the development of Darjeeling was a strategy for the British. As many of the groups residing in the eastern part of the Gorkha Empire (especially Rais and Limbus) conformed to the anthropological type of “sturdy hillmen” preferred by the British at the time, they “tacitly encouraged the immigration of labor from Nepal” (Middleton, 2010, p. 129). When the clearing of forest and planting of tea gardens picked up speed in mid-century, along with the recruitment of Gorkhas into the British Indian Army after 1857, the incentives to encourage immigration were even more obvious.

During the following many decades, large groups of people migrated eastwards across the border evading the emerging feudal system of tenure, taxation and exploitation built up under the Rana rulers. By 1881, the British judged that 88,000 people living in the Darjeeling area had been born in Nepal (O'Malley, 1907, pp. 43-44)<sup>48</sup>. Evading feudal exploitation back home, many of these people plunged directly into the capitalist exploitation of the colonial tea gardens employing “an enormous quantity of manual labour” (O'Malley, 1907, pp. 43-44). Thus, in 1874 almost 20,000 people were employed in the tea gardens. By 1901 the census “showed that the tea-garden coolies and their children accounted for more than two thirds of the total

<sup>48</sup> Although these figures should absolutely not be taken as accurate, their sheer magnitude is hard to ignore.

population” – by then a quarter of a million (Hunter, 1876, p. 165; O'Malley, 1907, p. 44). In the hills, the vast majority of these were from the ‘Nepali’ ethnic groups and most of them probably recent migrants.<sup>49</sup>

Not unlike Scott's hill people, these migrants were however – at least to begin with – anxiously avoiding the gaze of both imperial states. In the 1907 district gazetteer for Darjeeling, O'Malley thus describes how during the 1881 census operations “large numbers, filled with fears of the intentions of Government, as wild as they were vague, fled across the border to Nepal rather than face enumeration.” (O'Malley, 1907, p. 44). Middleton further describes how, facing the same political economy of land and labour as the British, “the Nepali Durbar did not approve” of the migration.<sup>50</sup> Hence, when the Gorkha rulers from time to time approached the eastern border of the Empire – as during Jung Bahadur Rana's massive hunting trip in 1864 – thousands of Nepali tea coolies fled the lines of the plantations overnight and disappeared from the gaze of the colonial state (Middleton, 2010, pp. 128-134). Nepalis settling as landless agricultural labourers were similarly invisible to the governmental gaze of the colonial state (Sarkar, 2010, p. 98). As Middleton argues from his engagement with the colonial archives: “thinking through the living conditions of these colonial labourers, we see that theirs was indeed a precarious, liminal dwelling.” (Middleton, 2010, p. 132).

<sup>49</sup> Michael Hutt states that over 90% of the tea labourers of 1876 came from the hills of eastern Nepal (1997, p. 112) and Kumar Pradhan estimates that 12-15% of the total Kirant (Rais, Limbus, Sunuwars) population of Nepal emigrated between 1840 and 1860 (K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], p. 211).

<sup>50</sup> According to E C Dozey's early *Concise History of the Darjeeling District* “in order to discourage emigration the Nepalese Durbar has placed a ban on women leaving the country on any pretext whatever” (1922, p. 40).

We might, in other words, see these migrants both as hill people tactically evading the imperial states and as labourers caught between a feudal and a colonial system of exploitation. But no matter the perspective, the inter-imperial stakes involved in attracting labour to work the land were so high that their migration history “was a history that could not officially exist” (Middleton, 2010, p. 130). In addition, the ‘planters paradise’ of Darjeeling was under far less governmental regulation than e.g. the tea-producing districts of the neighbouring areas in the north-east. Regarded as ‘waste land’ in the land regulations, the area was un-affected by tenure settlements and land reforms way into the post-colonial era (Sarkar, 2010, p. 105). Hence, tea plantation labour in Darjeeling leaves “little paper trail” (Middleton, 2010, p. 130n111). The historical conditions have, in other words, left the ‘Nepali’ migrant population with very little official history. And this lack of history can be seen both as an expression of and a ground for a fundamental anxiety of (non-) belonging in Darjeeling.

As Middleton describes, this anxiety of belonging was later harnessed and amplified by the “affective wizardry of Subash Ghisingh” – the leader of the Gorkhaland movement in the 1980s (Middleton, 2010, p. 151). During this movement, history thus emerged as a crucial stage for the contestation of belonging. From the 1990s ethnography emerged as another stage – one in which the self-fashioning of a range of ‘Nepali’ groups as unambiguous tribal subjects in the ethnographic gaze of the state could take place (Middleton, 2010, 2011). Thus, questions of belonging pervade the history of the ‘Nepali’ community in Darjeeling. However, there seems to be a shift in tactics taking place already between the major migration of the nineteenth

century and the Gorkhaland movement of the following century. Whereas the recent migrants were obviously reluctant to be seen by the (colonial) state, later political action became largely directed towards the state. Tactics of state-evasion were, in other words, supplemented or replaced by tactics of state recognition sometime between the late-nineteenth and the late-twentieth century. As I describe in the following section, this shift was connected to a gradual, but conscious development of a position as a ‘Nepali’ community with a range of politically shared objectives by emerging middle-class academics and representative organisations over the first decades of the twentieth century.

#### **Jati Improvement? From Evasion to Recognition**

When Subbash Ghising began his call for a Gorkhaland state in the 1980s, ethnic and national labels emerged as a contentious political matter.<sup>51</sup> This sensibility is grounded in a large repertoire of historical complexities of identity and belonging caused by the migration history just outlined. A number of the people later to be considered ‘Nepalis’ probably resided in the Darjeeling area already before the British arrived with their governmental tendencies to classify and enumerate (see Hutt, 1997, p. 121). As described above, much larger numbers

<sup>51</sup> Ghising preferred the name ‘Gorkha’ to designate the diverse community he claimed to represent, arguing that labels such as ‘Nepali’ indicated foreignness from India. While earlier, ‘Nepali’, ‘Gorkha’ and ‘Gorkhali’ had largely been used synonymously, they quickly became indicators of political distinction between the All India Gorkha League (AIGL, *Akhil Bharatya Gorkha League*), the GNLF, and a range of other academic and political groups (T. B. Subba, 1992, p. 67). Today, this search for a name that will, somehow, help solve the problem of precarious belonging for the community continues. In various publications and conferences, Subba and Sinha have e.g. taken the search further over the last decade suggesting various options such as “Indian Nepalis”, “Indians of Nepali Origin” (INO), and even “*Sakhaa*” (“friend”) (Sinha & Subba, 2003; T. B. Subba, Sinha, Nepal, & Nepal, 2009).

migrated into the area over the following decades. These people probably did not consider themselves ‘Nepali’ at the time, but most likely identified with a range of different ethnic groups. Many of them were from the Kirant groups – Limbu, Rai, Sunuwar – who had directly opposed the expansion of the Gorkha Empire. Others were Gurung, Magar and Tamang. In the first census of Darjeeling, these groups (except the Tamang) were registered as “other than natives of India and British Burmah [sic]” with the explanation “i.e. Nepalis”. However, at this point in time, ‘Nepal’ was mainly a British term for the Gorkha Empire (Burghart, 1984).<sup>52</sup> As soldiers the ‘Nepalis’ were nonetheless known to the British as ‘Gurkhas’ by the British, a corrupted spelling ‘Gorkhas’ surviving even today.

The complexities of ethnic labels and ‘Nepali’ belonging in Darjeeling are further compounded not only by the variegated history of territorial ownership, border-drawing and mobility. As Michael Hutt reminds us, what is now routinely referred to as the migration from Nepal to India in fact often merely involved moving “a few score miles, at a time when nations were less clearly conceptualized and national boundaries less clearly demarcated than they are today” (Hutt, 1997, p. 141n148). In summary:

(...) it can be argued that the present political boundary of Nepal – especially in the east – does not demarcate exactly the region whose population is numerically dominated by the originally disparate ethno-linguistic groups who are now categorized as ‘Nepalis’ (Hutt, 1997, p. 103).

<sup>52</sup> Inside the Gorkha empire, ‘Nepal’ referred solely to the governmental centre of the Kathmandu Valley. This name wasn’t extended to the whole empire until the 1930s (Burghart, 1984).

Such a long, rambling sentence – produced by a senior scholar of the area – can be seen as symptomatic not only of the historical complexities of belonging, but also of the contentious present in which interpretations of this history are inscribed. Across the last three decades of identity politics in Darjeeling, all of the different names and levels of identification have been activated at one point or another.

Within this complex historical position, projects of shaping a common position nonetheless emerged. In the early twentieth century, local academics such as Parasmani Pradhan began promoting the Nepali language and an agenda of *jati* (group/community) improvement (see e.g. Chalmers, 2009; Hutt, 1997; Onta, 1996b). Along with the shared Nepali language, the writings of these academics touched upon the common experiences of migration, tea garden labour, and Gurkha military service. As Parasmani Pradhan stated at the inaugural meeting of the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* (Nepali Literature Society) – formed together with the fellow academics Dharanidar Koirala, Suryabikram Gyawali and others in 1924:

The Darjeeling Nepalis have become a *jāti* that is bound together by the thread (*sūtra*) of common experience, shared sentiments, and a single language (Parasmani Pradhan cited and translated in Hutt, 1997, p. 117).

The word *jati* has multiple uses in Nepali typically referring to a ‘race’ or ‘species’ or ‘type’ (e.g. *manav jati* as human race, *Nepali jati* as Nepali nationality) and is distinct from the word *jat* indicating caste or ethnic group (Hutt, 1997, p. 116). In Parasmani’s speech it obviously indicates some form of common identity across the various *jat* that migrated to Darjeeling.

While Nepali language and *jati* improvement in India had already been promoted by various people and publications in Banaras, the activities in Darjeeling had a different character (see Chalmers, 2002). As Rhoderick Chalmers notes, “to a greater extent than in Banaras they initiated essentially modern projects, which appreciated the value of working with and exploiting the modern state” (Chalmers, 2009, pp. 110-111). In Darjeeling, the Nepali activists were directly lobbying the colonial state. Parasmani and the *sammelan* thus pushed for, and eventually attained, the acceptance of Nepali first as language of examination in Calcutta college (1918) and later as a medium of instruction in the primary schools of Darjeeling (1935). Alongside this, Parasmani managed to get connected to the famous Macmillan publishers and had by 1940 produced and published thirty textbooks. These continue to be a monolithic reference point for contemporary Nepali textbooks in Darjeeling. Hence, in contrast to the earlier tactics of state evasion, budding representatives of the ‘Nepali’ community had become strongly involved with the state.

Later, the discourses of both Ghisingh’s and Gurung’s Gorkhaland movement have written these early attempts at gaining state recognition into the movements genealogy. Although Parasmani Pradhan and his group’s initiatives might arguably be seen “as a project of differentiation where-by a proto-middle class deploying its educational and cultural capital, separated itself from the larger coolie population of the Darjeeling area”, they have later been cast as part of a genealogy of popular mobilisation (Onta, 1996b, p. 67). Similarly, the various proposals presented by the Hillmen’s Association and other representatives since 1907 are now routinely rehearsed as historical forerunners to the Gorkhaland movement, although they probably

represented a highly elitist, pro-British planter position at the time – a position that conflicted somewhat with the of Parasmani and the other “proto-middle class” intellectuals (Dasgupta, 1999, pp. 58-59).<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, the writings of Parasmani Pradhan and his likeminded contemporaries, provided a crucial source of inspiration for the national textbooks of Panchayat Nepal (Chalmers, 2009; Onta, 1996a, 1996b). As I describe in further detail in chapter five, these writings provided the new nationalist discourse of the Panchayat with notions of a brave past. As with the Nepali community in Darjeeling, these notions enabled the Nepali state to differentiate itself from the large southern neighbour in a situation where the country was increasingly incorporated into regional and global regimes of economic development (Onta, 1996a, 1996b). They thus provided a crucial backdrop for the Panchayat regime’s central notion of national development and, with this, for a further national territorialisation of the rugged Himalayan hills. In the following chapter, I analyse this territorialisation and the language of difference as it was taught through the Panchayat textbooks.

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<sup>53</sup> Local academics such as T. B. Subba and A.C. Sinha’s have supported this genealogy in research projects and writing focused on the ‘identity crisis’ of the ‘Indian Nepalis’ (see e.g. Sinha & Subba, 2003; T. B. Subba, 1992; T. B. Subba et al., 2009). As described in chapter eight, their idea of a historically rooted ‘identity crisis’ as it was spawned in reflections on the 80s movement was later brought into the discursive and rhetorical repertoire of the recent Gorkhaland movement.

## Chapter 5: Teaching a Language of Difference

*Nepali historians have dwelt on the historic destiny of Prithvi Narayan Shah the Great, who in the mid eighteenth century forged the Gorkhali Empire in the hills as a bulwark against the firingis in the plains. His patriotism was so great, he defended Nepali independence before it was invented. (Bell, 2012)*

On the introductory pages of present-day academic and popular writing on the Nepali politics and society, the year 1990 and its People's Movement (*Jana Andolan*) show up repeatedly. As approached from the present, 1990 is seen as the first step towards a New Nepal (*Naya Nepal*). Although the political notion of *Naya Nepal* is often approached with a somewhat sceptical attitude, the idea that something new is taking place, that Nepal since 1990 has been undergoing rapid and radical change, is everywhere to be found. In this chapter, I take a look at the immediate background for this notion of newness and change – the thirty years of Panchayat rule from 1960 to 1990. In this period, a new line of nationalist government was introduced. I investigate this government through the school textbooks that emerged within one of the main new governmental technologies at the time: national schooling.

Through a comparative analysis of 'civics' textbooks from the late Panchayat period and those in use today, I argue that the ostensible focus on national unity in the struggle for economic development obscures an elaborate language of difference. Providing a more widespread extension of government across the country than ever before, we might see the Panchayat textbooks as producing a more integrated territorial imagination of the landscape than before as well as the first truly nation-wide language of difference between people.

While the governmental gaze under the Rana rulers was built explicitly on a language of difference between people – as expressed in hierarchical organisation of castes in the civil code – the extension of this language across the country was, most likely, patchy and concentrated around the governmental centre of Kathmandu (R. Pradhan, 2002). But with the introduction of national schooling, a language of 'unity-in-diversity' with an explicit focus on unity but a persistent subtext of unequal diversity could be extended wider than ever before. The textbooks thus provided educated citizens with a fluency in a language of difference that, possibly for the first time, spanned a national scale. As I argue in the following chapter, the consequence of this seems to be that this 'language of the state' has also emerged as the language in which to approach the state – a language of politics.

### Panchayat Textbooks as a National Language of Difference

From the 1960's, Nepal entered a high time of nationalism under the Panchayat rule. In 1950, an alliance of exiled political parties and king Tribhuvan succeeded in breaking the hold on power maintained by the Rana lineage of prime ministers since 1846. Over the following years, shifting constellations of the King, Ranas and political party representatives ruled the country while shuffling for power between each other. In 1959 an election for parliament was held, but already the following year, king Mahendra dissolved parliament and imprisoned many of the political leaders. Mahendra's justification was that multi-party democracy had been proven unsuitable for Nepal. Banning political parties, Mahendra instead presented a vision of a party-less 'Panchayat democracy'. This 'unique' system of government evolved around the king and village councils (*panchayats*) – two supposedly

‘native’ institutions “commonly known and understood by the people” (King Mahendra cited in Khadka, 1986, p. 433).<sup>54</sup> Through these institutions, Nepali citizens were supposed to unite as one nation under the ubiquitous aim of economic development (*bikas*) (Gellner, 2007, p. 10).

Supported by early American aid to the education sector,<sup>55</sup> Panchayat ideology foregrounded education as a key element in the overall goal of national development. While school education had deliberately been restricted under most of the Rana rule (Onta, 1996a, p. 215; Whelpton, 2005, pp. 83,165)<sup>56</sup>, the Nepali education system was nationalized and extended more widely than ever before during the Panchayat period (Caddell, 2006; Onta, 1996a, p. 221; Petersen, 2011).<sup>57</sup> The 1971 National Education System Plan presented education as “an investment in human resources for the development of the country” (cited in Onta, 1996a, p. 220). Education was to “serve the

<sup>54</sup> Between these extremes, representation was organized in multiple layers of decreasing popular influence from the village council (*gaun panchayat*) to the national council (*rastriya panchayat*) (see e.g. Borgström, 1976; Gellner, 2007, p. 10; Khadka, 1986).

<sup>55</sup> See <http://nepal.usaid.gov/about-us/history.html>. The American assistance to the education sector was personified in the ‘education advisor’ Hugh B. Woods who played a key role in the development of Nepal’s first national education plan (cf e.g. NEPC, 1956).

<sup>56</sup> As presented later in this chapter, the Panchayat discourse foregrounds and dramatizes the restrictions on education as illustrative of the ‘dark age’ of Rana rule prior to Panchayat developmentalism (see Onta, 1996a; N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], pp. 52,56).

<sup>57</sup> In 1951, by the end of the Rana regime, Nepal had only 321 primary and 11 secondary schools for a population of about 8,25 million (1952/4 census). By the end of the Panchayat period in 1990 the number of primary schools was 14,500, lower secondary schools 3,964, and upper secondary schools 1953 (Shrestha cited in Stash & Hannum, 2009) for a population of 18,5 million (1991 census).

country’s need and aspiration”<sup>58</sup> in terms of both material development and national cohesion. As the plan states:

(...) roads and tracks are not laid-out by natural volition just as sectional parochialism cannot be transformed into social cohesion without deliberate effort (...) politicisation of the traditional multi-ethnic Nepalese societies will not lead to national solidarity and independent sovereign nationhood without a central guidance in planned socialisation (...) (cited in Onta, 1996a, p. 220).

Through the construction of schools and distribution of centrally prescribed textbooks, the new nationalised education system was to be the main institution for such “planned socialisation” providing national unity for the sake of development.

With education posed as a deliberate means to promote national cohesion and development, educational material provides an important source for analysing the Panchayat state’s discourse on the nation and national space (cf. Onta, 1996a; Pigg, 1992).<sup>59</sup> As the education system expanded during the Panchayat period, centrally prescribed school textbooks attained a broader reach in Nepali society than most other media reaching “places where even state newspapers like the *Gorkhapatra* did not” (Onta, 1996a, pp. 231-232).<sup>60</sup> Textbooks should therefore not only be seen as a medium for transmitting the Panchayat state’s discursive representations of national space. In their

<sup>58</sup> This needs discourse resembles Indian national discourse on development in the same period as described by (S. Roy, 2007, pp. 106-114). While both countries present discourses on supposedly distinctive *national* development they, at the same time seem to be entangled in a “development hegemony” on a global scale” (S. Roy, 2007, p. 107). See also (Ludden, 1992, 2005a).

<sup>59</sup> According to a government official who worked with textbook production under Panchayat rule, the curriculum and textbooks were until 1990 “fully controlled by the palace”. Interviewed during fieldwork, Sanothimi, September 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Radio broad-casting might have been the only farther-reaching media at the time – cf. (cf. Onta, 1996a).

unprecedented dissemination throughout national territory, the textbooks themselves were artefacts of a nation-wide spatial practice. New school buildings and textbooks arriving from the central printing press in Kathmandu valley were, in the various localities of Panchayat Nepal where they were received, important material representations of ‘development’ and the existence of a uniform national space within distinct territorial borders (cf. Skinner & Holland, 2009 [1996]). Both the discursive representations in the textbooks and their spatial dissemination thus contributed to the production of a national space within territorial borders.

For many, the Panchayat schooling of the 80s provided the first entry into a nation-wide literacy of governmental differentiation – within a discourse of unity in national development. As Skinner and Holland argue on the basis of detailed, long-term fieldwork with Nepali students:

Even by the mid-1980s, the young Nepalis that Skinner followed from 1985 to 1993 were still some of the first in their area to experience state-provided schooling. (...) young Nepalis in their school and subsequent careers readily appropriated the development rhetoric presented to them in their textbooks and classroom lectures. In our frequent talks with them, the students passionately identified with the needs of their country and spoke of preparing themselves for a future of good works directed towards the development of their community in particular, and Nepal in general (Skinner & Holland, 2009 [1996], pp. 295-296).

Across a period where the literacy rate for Nepalis rose many-fold<sup>61</sup>, the discursive underpinning of this literacy was, in other words,

<sup>61</sup> Although the figures are probably not very precise, Skinner and Holland report a rise from about 5% adult literacy in the early 50s to about 36% by the end of the 80s (Skinner & Holland, 2009 [1996], p. 301).

highly influenced by the governmental gaze of the developmentalist state. Concomitantly, education, along with the related possibility of emerging attractive jobs in the development sector, folded the image of the education person back onto notions of development. As Skinner and Holland argue, being a developed (*bikasi*) was largely equated with being educated (*parhne manche*) and vice versa (Skinner & Holland, 2009 [1996]). A consequence of this, I argue, is that literacy in the specific, nation-wide language of difference that provides the subtext to the Panchayat textbooks’ overt focus on unity in development has become a marker of being developed/educated. Hence, fluency in one categorisation within the language of difference between people has emerged as a distinguishing characteristic within another.

#### The Brave Beginning of a Territorialisated Time-in-Space

The Nepali historian Pratyoush Onta has already analysed some Panchayat textbooks.<sup>62</sup> Onta shows that the national history (*Rastriya Itihas*) presented in these textbooks is rendered in what he calls “*bir to bikas* (brave to development) narrative mode” (Onta, 1996a, p. 222; see also Onta, 1997). This implies a description of pre-Rana national history in terms of the bravery (*bir*) associated with the ‘unification’ of Nepal as a basis for the post-Rana focus on national development (*bikas*). Onta argues that:

Nationalization of the past in the *bir* mode and that of the future in *bikas* mode have been critical to the functioning of the state in the post-Rana era. (...) *Bir* history provided the bearings of an independent land on which *bikas* projects could be enacted. With

<sup>62</sup> While Onta bases his analysis on two Nepali language primers (“Mahendramala”, grades four and five) from the early 70s, my analysis focuses on ‘civics’ textbooks from the 80s (grades six and seven, based on a curriculum from 1981) and late 2000’s (grades six to ten, based on a curriculum from 2005).



foreign money and models pouring into Nepal in the name of development, it was *bir* history that made the country's *bikas* "Nepali" (Onta, 1996a, p. 232).

The writing of a brave national history was, in other words, part of what enabled an extensively nationalist discourse on development even in a time of increasing openness to 'foreign' influence (see also Chene, 1996, p. 266).

In my analysis of later Panchayat textbooks, similar notions of a past cast in terms of *braveness* and a future described in a language of *development* come out clearly. The 1989 (2046BS) 'civics' textbook for grade seven e.g. commences with a long range of lessons that chronologically follow the lineage of Nepali kings from Prithvi Narayan Shah to Birendra.<sup>63</sup> These lessons take the reader through the glorious past of the early kings 'unifying' Nepal, over the "Dark Age" of Rana rule and into the Panchayat periods renewed development of the country (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 56). Approached from the Panchayat present the immediate past of Rana rule is strongly cast as a "Dark Age" due to its failure to deliver development. The Ranas are described as autocrats that "could not take benefit from [the] independence" that they had inherited from the brave past. They failed to "use Nepalese manpower" to improve international trade and development (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], pp. 53-54) and thus to live up to the promises of the brave Gorkhas that had secured the territory and people needed for such development. In other words, by

<sup>63</sup> During my fieldwork, I located copies of the textbooks analysed in this chapter in the Department of Education library in Sanathimi. Narayan Adhikary later helped in acquiring copies of the textbooks and Yubaraj Ghimire assisted in translating substantial sections for analysis. When quoting from the translations, I present Ghimire's translation with minor alterations when needed to enhance the legibility of the text.

not exploiting the territorial foundation established by *bir* history, the Ranas were robbing the country of *bikas*.<sup>64</sup>

Tying a line from a brave past to a future of development, the textbooks provide a national time-in-space that connect the contemporary territorial borders of the country with a historical beginning in the brave conquests of Prithvi Narayan Shah – referred to as the 'unification of Nepal'. The 'unification' discourse in turn imbues Shah with the vision of a pre-nation nationalist. While government documents as late as the 1930s, in fact, referred to the imperial area as "the entire possessions of the Gorkha king" (Burghart, 1984, p. 119), this discourse sees a national territory of 'Nepal' already in the Gorkha kingdom.<sup>65</sup> This gives rise to a national 'time-in-space' (see Ludden, 2012, p. 5) that ties the beginning of Nepali history to the figure of Prithvi Narayan Shah and renders all time before his rule as 'pre-history'.<sup>66</sup> In this representation, national notions of a unified history and territory are, in other words, pushed back into what is essentially an imperial history (see especially K. Pradhan, 1991).

In the textbook, the stories of Prithvi Narayan Shah and his brave men territorialise the imperial landscape of the Himalayan hills extending the contemporary borders of Nepal back into the time of the early Gorkha Empire. Vividly illustrated by an image that superimposes the characteristic profile of Prithvi Narayan Shah onto

<sup>64</sup> Education is a central element in this narrative. One textbook e.g. states that "Nepalese society suffered from deep sickness because of the lack of education" (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 60) – restricted by the Ranas (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 52) while the hallmark of Panchayat developmentalist ideology.

<sup>65</sup> The British in India referred to the Gorkha kingdom as Nepal (or Nipal, or Nepaul) much earlier, while inside the kingdom the name Nepal was used to refer to the Kathmandu valley (Burghart, 1984).

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. (CDC, 2009a:114-123; 2009b, pp. 83-92), (Shaha, 2001), and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_nepal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_nepal) (accessed June 2012).

the present-day borders of the country (see illustration 1), these stories fuse the temporal association of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Gorkha ruler with the territorial delineations of the contemporary Nepali nation-state – emphasising independence and sovereignty at a time when this was, in fact, increasingly compromised by reliance on foreign aid (Chene, 1996). Elaborating on Shah’s alertness to the threat of the Mughal Empire the grade seven, ‘civic’ textbook e.g. poses Shah’s conquest of the Kathmandu valley as part of a ‘unification’ that saved the liberty of Nepal:

The rich kings from Kathmandu were not only sinking in amusement, they were ready to give the area to foreign countries. But Prithvi Narayan Shah saved the liberty of Nepal. (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 5).

In line with the quote introducing this chapter, Shah is thus presented as a pre-nation nationalist, and territorial sovereignty of the nation itself is pushed back into his time.



Illustration 1: Prithvi Narayan Shah’s characteristic pose superimposed onto borders of the national territory that weren’t settled until half a century after his death (N. P. Shrestha, 1987 [2044 BS], p. 36).

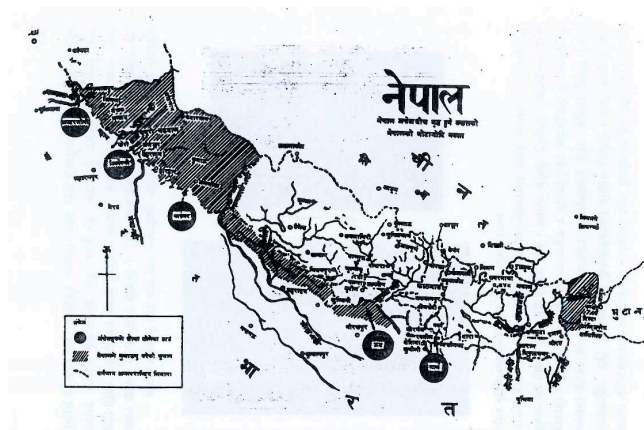
A range of subsequent stories of the following decade’s conquests and battles provide the material for further cementation of the territory in relation to the bravery of Nepali soldiers.<sup>67</sup> As the textbook goes through the various conquests leading up to the encounter with the British, the territorial references obviously shift as the borders are expanded. In spite of this, the reference to present-day borders is maintained through a distinction between what is phrased as “unification” of Nepal and what is phrased as “extensions” of Nepali nationality (*Nepali Rastriyata*) into a “greater Nepal” (*visal Nepal*) (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], pp. 8-13, 20-21).<sup>68</sup> The use of these linguistic distinctions related to the movement of the Gorkha troops helps to create the representation of a fixed, demarcated territory of Nepal.

The representation of fixed territorial borders is further supported by the visual mapping of the area in the Panchayat textbooks. One book e.g. displays first a map of the present-day Nepali borders with the Greater Nepal areas added in a darker shade. Halfway through the

<sup>67</sup> In the article mentioned above, Pratyoush Onta (1996a) shows how this is done in relation to the famous story of the Gorkha officer Balbhadra’s brave battle with the British. Attempting to hold a fort at Nalapani (near Dheradun in present-day Uttarakhand) against overwhelming British force, Balbhadra and his men, women and children fight bravely, but have to finally abandon the fort when the British cut off the water supply (see CDC, 2009d, pp. 118-119 for a present-day textbook version of the story). Though they lost the battle in the end, the Panchayat “desire to read Nepal’s independence and sovereignty in its past is so strong that Balbhadra’s temporary supremacy over the British becomes the story of Nepali bravery at work” (Onta, 1996a, p. 231). Whether the ‘boulders’ are Mughal or British, the representation of national space that comes out of the Panchayat textbooks is thus already territorialised within specified borders and kept independent and sovereign through the bravery of Balbhadra and other famous figures.

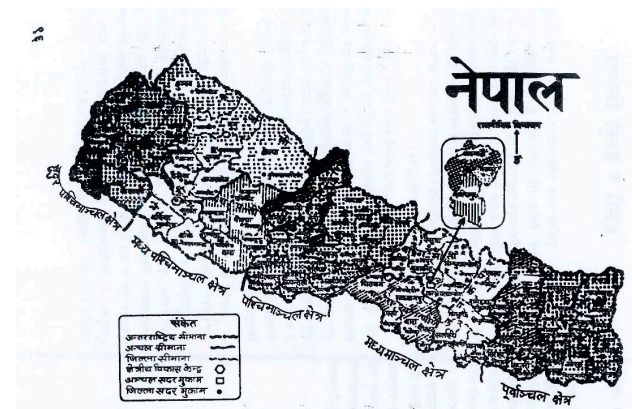
<sup>68</sup> While the brave Gorkha army officers thus “reached the Teesta in the east singing the slogan of nationalism” (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 20) this was part of ‘the extension of nationality’ - not the ‘unification’.

book, the map is repeated but now the surrounding areas of Greater Nepal have been removed and the country has been divided into the Panchayat administration's "development regions" (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], pp. 30, 96).<sup>69</sup> Both discursive and mapped representations thus provide a territorialisation of the landscape combined with a national time-in-space that moves from bravery towards development.



Map 1: Greater Nepal (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 30)

<sup>69</sup> Likewise, the 2009 textbook's lesson on "attempts for the unification of Nepal" includes an assignment in which the students are asked to locate the central historical places of Gorkha and Nuwakot in a map of Nepal that displays the present-day borders and administrative delineations (fourteen zones) (CDC, 2009d, pp. 108-109).



Map 2: Panchayat Nepal with Development Regions (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 96)

### The Timeless Present in 'a Garden of Diverse Flowers'

As the past in Panchayat discourse is imagined in terms of bravery, the present is repeatedly represented through the timeless and harmonious image of a flowering garden. The representation of Nepal as flower-garden (*phulbaari*) stems from Prithvi Narayan Shah's memoir (*Divya Upadhes*, 'divine' teachings) where he, supposedly, likened his empire to 'a garden of many different flowers'. While the original text's "archaic language" means that "nobody", according to the historian John Whelpton, "can be sure what the intended meaning was" (Whelpton in K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], p. xiii), a common, nationalist interpretation was in place throughout the Panchayat period. Here, the metaphor of the flower garden is seen to represent the beautiful diversity of the country as well as Prithvi Narayan Shah's wise – almost multiculturalist – acknowledgement of this. The flower garden emerges as a timeless characteristic of national space, that, in line with

its timelessness is repeated across Panchayat and present-day textbooks.

With obvious connotation to beauty, fertility and harmony, the imagination of the country as a flower-garden is seen as an expression of the equality of all Nepalis within a notion of unity in diversity (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 2). In contrast to the jungle, the garden (*baari*) connotes an organised and harmonious space – not unlike the image of the colonial hill station presented in the previous chapter. As a recent textbook recycles the metaphor, it states that: “we all castes, classes and ethnic groups (...) live together in harmony. We make a garland of all castes like the bouquet of flowers” (CDC, 2009c, p. 30). The notion of a garland brings out how the different people of Nepal are tied together – a peaceful unity that is repeatedly posed as a defining characteristic of the country (cf. e.g. CDC, 2009a, p. 61). Hence, while recognising ethnic, religious and caste diversity, the image of the national garden de-emphasises the salience that these lines of division held in Panchayat Nepal and largely continue to hold today (see e.g. WB, 2006). Along with the 1963 revision of the Civil Code’s formalised hierarchy of people, the representation of the country as a garden imposes a harmonious surface onto a highly uneven landscape of imperial difference.

Even in the contemporary conjuncture, where differences between people (of caste, ethnicity, religion, gender etc.) are increasingly politicised on a background of past inequalities, the representation of Nepal as a diverse, but harmonious, flower-garden lives on in the centralised discourse of present-day textbooks. A grade six textbook e.g. states:

“Nepal is our motherland. It is called a common garden of four castes and thirty-six sub-castes. We, the people of the country, are like different flowers grown in a garden. We are different in face and colour. Apparently, there is a difference in our forms and kinds. This variation is called thirty-six sub-castes.” (CDC, 2009b, p. 26)

In spite of differences, “all people living in Nepal have similar interests and aspirations” (CDC, 2009b, p. 34). Harmonious coexistence is thus, even today, represented as a timeless condition of the nation rather than something that has to be achieved.

Outside the official discourse of the textbooks, the image of the flower-garden has, however, come under attack. Kumar Pradhan’s history book *The Gorkha Conquest* e.g. provides an explicit attack on the Panchayat framing of Shah’s vision (cf. Gellner in K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], p. vii). The research for the book was undertaken in relation to Pradhan’s doctoral dissertation published almost a decade earlier in 1982, but its publication as a book in 1991 was clearly part of an upsurge of critical reflection after the Panchayat period (K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], pp. vii, xiv, xxiii).<sup>70</sup> Pradhan argues that Shah’s lesson on Nepal as a flower-garden has been “misquoted” suggesting instead the following translation:

If (my) soldiers and courtiers are not given to seeking pleasure, my sword can strike in all directions. If they are given to pleasure, this will not remain a kingdom acquired with no little pain by me, but (it will be) a common garden of all kinds (of people). But if everyone is watchful, this will be a true Hindusthan (Hindu Land) ... of all higher and lower castes (...) (K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], p. 169)

<sup>70</sup> References in this dissertation are to a reprint of Pradhan’s book, published by Himal Books in 2009 and now widely available in Nepal.

Such a translation clearly leads to a very different image of the garden. In contrast to the ‘true Hindustan’ organised hierarchically into higher and lower castes, the garden now shows up as an unwanted, chaotic place. The critique thus provides the representation of Nepali national space as a flower-garden with bleaker connotations to the hierarchical differentiation of people that characterised the government gaze of the Gorkha kingdom.

In line with this, it has repeatedly been pointed out over the last two decades that the superficially harmonious representation of Nepal’s unity in diversity silences and aggravates the economic marginalisation and political underrepresentation of a large majority of Nepal’s (non-high caste, Hindu, male) population. In 1992, Nepali social scientist Prayag Raj Sharma in 1992 e.g. asked: “Why not pull down the hedges and let a hundred wildflowers bloom?” (P. R. Sharma, 1992, pp. 7, 9; see also P. R. Sharma, 1997). Sharma’s critique is interesting as it indicates some of the political work done by the aesthetic image of the garden. Under the title “How to Tend This Garden,” his article alerts us to another dimension of the garden metaphor. While the garden is an organised space, it is so because it has been ‘tended’, ‘weeds’ have been uprooted and harmony established through the centralised vision of the gardener (cf. Malkki, 1992).

In the 1982 Panchayat textbook for grade eight the national garden’s need of ‘tending’ comes out strongly. A lesson on the ‘qualities of a good citizen’ conjures up the image of the development of a communal garden and the works involved such as ‘watering’ and ‘weeding’ (N. P. Shrestha, 1987 [2044 BS], pp. 34-35). It suggests that “we can trim the plants of many types to give them beautiful

shapes to decorate the garden,” and – bringing the notion of development up to modern times – exclaims:

How enticing the garden would be if we could generate hydro-electricity from nearby waterfalls or rivers and adorn the garden with illuminating electric bulbs like thousands of stars in the sky! Our beautiful tranquil country (...) is in fact a natural garden (...). (N. P. Shrestha, 1987 [2044 BS], pp. 34-35)

In the Panchayat rendering, development - in the tangible form of electric lighting - is brought about through the careful tending of the garden that is Nepal. And, in the *bir to bikas* narrative form of the textbooks, this tending is brought home as “our responsibility” to the bravery of the national past epitomised in Shah’s visionary effort (N. P. Shrestha, 1987 [2044 BS], p. 35).

Following Sharma’s indication, I would argue that the ostensibly unifying image of the organised and tended garden incorporates a subtext that brings the imperial landscape into the national territory. When seen in relation to the history of cultivation and settlement across the Himalayan hills, the organised garden brings out an ecological division between settled cultivation and chaotic wilderness. As Marie Lecomte-Tilouine has recently argued, this division maps onto the earlier hierarchical differentiation of people along lines of Hindu purity that was formalised in the civil code in the mid-nineteenth century. Here, upper caste Hindus migrating eastwards across the Himalayan hills are seen as the bringers of settled cultivation engendering a “transformation of *jangal* into *mangal*, or wilderness into auspiciousness” (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2010, p. 120). During the Panchayat years, this image was underpinned by an intensification of existing policies that encouraged (mainly Hindu) migration for agricultural settlement especially in the eastern hills and the plains.

Across the Rana and Panchayat periods of government, this settlement did in fact transform the landscape substantially from the “wild” aesthetic of sparser settlement and rotational cultivation to the more ordered aesthetic of permanent, terraced farming (Sagant, 1996, pp. 328-335). Hence, there continues to be a subtext of hierarchical difference attached to the continued use of the flower-garden metaphor.

In summary, the Panchayat textbooks’ discourse on the brave past territorialise Nepali national space within distinct borders that did not, in fact, exist in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Within this territory, the image of a well-tended garden ostensibly dissolves the imperial hierarchies of people within a harmonious aesthetic. Nonetheless, this aesthetic concomitantly conceals and delivers a language of ecological and anthropological difference. As Pradhan and other critics have pointed out, these representations of national space are obviously “born out of a hindsight view of Nepalese history in modern times” (K. Pradhan, 2009 [1991], p. 168). Nonetheless, they continue well into the textbooks used today in Nepali public schools across the country, and continue to support a certain overlap between a national language of difference and education.

#### **Towards the Future on the Waves of Development**

*Let us all go to the school for education. Let us go to the health post when we are sick. Let us make the village and town bright with electricity. Let us drive motors in all regions of Nepal. Let us drink safe water in each house. Let us send messages to friends through e-mail.* (CDC, 2009c, p. 13)

A final and overwhelming focus of Panchayat discourse is that of development – a focus that largely similarly stretches across the 1990 watershed. With the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1950, Nepal

quickly followed India in adopting governmental discourses and policies explicitly aimed at national development. Albeit phrased explicitly in nationalist terms, Nepal’s new project of development connected the country tightly into the expanding post-war development regime (Ludden, 2005a; Pigg, 1993, p. 45). During the Panchayat period, the net inflow of official development assistance (ODA) to the country multiplied. From an average of 80 million US\$ per year in the 60s, it more than doubled over the 70s and finally exploded to an average of 561 million US\$ per year in the 80s.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, as Stacy Leigh Pigg suggested in 1993, “judging from the changes in Nepal, development has proved much more effective as an ideology than as a set of technical solutions” (Pigg, 1993, p. 47). As an ideology, however, development has become ubiquitous across the nation from the Panchayat period onwards – even in areas where the practical reach of development projects has been limited (Chene, 1996; Pigg, 1992; 1993, p. 48).

The massive focus on development provides a direction to the Nepali nation that reorganises national space within territorial boundaries. Much in line with the Nehruvian development discourse discussed in the previous chapter, the Panchayat nation is presented as in need of development and the national citizens as resources with an obligation to fulfil this need. As they are harnessed to the overall objective of development, people and places are ostensibly detached from their earlier differences. Again bringing up clear similarities with India, national space is represented through the supposedly uniform image of the backward village (Pigg, 1992). The Panchayat textbooks

<sup>71</sup> All figures are in constant 2009 US\$. Since 1990 figures have been consistently high, averaging 553 million US\$ per year in the 90s and 589 million US\$ per year in the 2000s. (Source: World Development Indicators 2011).

e.g. repeatedly refer to common sentiments of national loyalty in “our villages” or among “every family in every village” (N. P. Shrestha, 1987 [2044 BS], p. 12; 1989 [2046 BS], pp. 17, 39). From the centralised perspective of planned state-led development, the landscape is thus flattened into a “sea of villageness” (Pigg, 1992, p. 503) onto which the “wave of development” (CDC, 2009a, p. 104) can roll. And as the 1963 administrative reorganisation of the country into five “Development Regions” and fourteen “Development Zones” named after geographical features such as river and mountains, this sea of villages is organised through categories unmarked by earlier forms of governmental differentiation.

However, the superficial uniformity of the sea of villages in the development representations of national space does not really erase earlier differences and even brings about its own form of spatial inequality. In the developmental map of Panchayat discourse, the periphery of ‘village’ Nepal – home, at that time, to more than ninety per cent of the Nepali population – is presented as ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘backward’. As Pigg argues:

Development focuses its efforts on villages because (ostensibly) most Nepalis live in them, but in doing so it reifies the village as the locus of Nepal’s underdevelopment. Hence, the village becomes a space of backwardness – a physical space that imprisons people in what is considered an inferior and outmoded way of life. (Pigg, 1992, p. 507)

As this developmental map not only *charts* national space in terms of development, but also *orients* people in certain directions within that space (see also Lakier, 2005, p. 145; Pigg, 1992, p. 499) it provides a

hegemonic, uniform but unequal, representation of national space that stretches well into present discourse.<sup>72</sup>

This representation of national space as a ‘sea of villageness’ continues today. The grade six textbook from 2009 e.g. ask the students to “complete the following dialogue” that illustrates “the problems in the absence of electricity” (CDC, 2009b, p. 22):

Shyam: Our country first started electricity production in 1965.  
When did you start using electricity in your village?

Hari: We don’t have electricity even now. Our village is in darkness.

Shyam: I’m sorry to hear that. How do you study, listen to radio or watch the interesting programmes on television?

Hari: Our life is dark. We have been living a life of difficulty.

Shyam: It seems your village is still not developed.

Hari’s village still hasn’t got electricity – the epitome of development – today although the national production (i.e. in the cities) began in 1965. As the textbook spells it out, the consequence is that the villagers live a life of ‘darkness’ without radio, television or even electric light to study by. Albeit part of a superficially uniform national space, Hari’s village is situated on the periphery of the developmentalist map of Nepal. Within the sea of development, as the grade seven textbook states, “the wave of development has not reached all places (...) in a uniform manner” (CDC, 2009a, p. 104).

As the wave of development hasn’t conquered all parts of the sea, the developmental representation of national space gives rise to a

<sup>72</sup> Pigg’s concepts of *charting* and *orienting* obviously resemble de Certeau’s idea that space can be narrated either as *maps* or *tours* (Certeau, 1984, pp. 118-122). For a delineation of what we might understand by hegemonic space see (Kipfer, 2008), for a critique of the idea that Panchayat ideology was hegemonic see (Lakier, 2005, p. 156)

differentiation in which ‘remote’ areas are considered ‘backward’. Here, spatial distance becomes temporal distance. A Panchayat textbook lesson brings this points forward rather starkly, stating that:

During the reign of King Mahendra, there were many underdeveloped places in Nepal that were just waking up from the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s revelation and many places were sleeping in the middle ages. In addition, in some of the places in remote Nepal they were just trying to step out from the Stone Age. (N. P. Shrestha, 1989 [2046 BS], p. 71)

In slightly less forceful terms, the same notion of an opposition between remoteness within the national territory and development continues in present textbooks. A lesson on the administrative zones of Nepal e.g. simply states that the “Karnali Zone is very remote while Lumbini and Narayani zones are somewhat more developed” (CDC, 2009a, pp. 7, 67). This spatial differentiation between developed and remote areas provides a *direction* to development – as Pigg puts it: “bikās comes to the local areas from elsewhere; it is not produced locally” (Pigg, 1992, p. 499).

There is a certain circularity to this opposition between development and remoteness. As Pigg describes “the topographical constraints we call ‘remoteness’ are commonly blamed for the limits of development’s reach in the countryside” (Pigg, 1993, p. 48). Similarly, as education is seen as the “primary institution of bikas” (Onta, 1996a; Pigg, 1992, p. 502; Skinner & Holland, 2009 [1996]), we can regard the movement of textbooks as a spatial practice physically manifesting this direction of development. The movement of textbooks, even today, trace out routes from the urban centre to the rural villages. All textbooks continue to be not only edited, but also printed in the central

education offices in the Sanothimi area of Kathmandu valley.<sup>73</sup> At the beginning of each school year, the books are distributed from here to the District Education Offices (DEOs) in all seventy-five districts of the country from where they are again re-distributed to the individual schools. With this system, books often arrive late and in insufficient quantities to the ‘remote’ areas of the country. The spatial practice of textbook production thus reinforces the connotation of remote areas with lack in education and development.<sup>74</sup>

As argued above, the Panchayat discourse on development obviously contains its own hierarchies of central development and remote backwardness in spite of its superficially uniform representation of Nepal as a sea of villages. Furthermore, while Panchayat government obviously sought to overcome the social hierarchies of the Rana period by abolishing the old civil code, reorganising territorial administration, applying a language of equal national citizenship etc. these differences remained visible below the surface of the developmental ‘sea’. Out there in ‘village’ Nepal the old hierarchies coexisted with the new differentiation of centres and peripheries of development leaving people “simultaneously caught up in two social orders” (Pigg, 1992, p. 510). In some instances, notions of development even intensified existing social differences (Pigg, 1993, p. 54). Pigg (1992, p. 501) e.g. presents an illustration from a Panchayat textbook (see illustrations below). Seemingly inspired by an Indian textbook illustration from the same period depicting “citizens of India”, the

<sup>73</sup> The Department of Education (DoE), the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) and the Janak Education Materials Centre Ltd. (JEMCL) are the three central offices all placed in Sanothimi.

<sup>74</sup> The information given here is based on a range of interviews with officials from the education bureaucracy (central and district level) and schoolteachers conducted during fieldwork in the autumn of 2010.



accompanying text explicitly describes people in equal terms as “having the same red blood” (N. P. Shrestha, 1987 [2044 BS], p. 18). The illustration itself, however, re-inscribe a hierarchy of development that follows ethnic, religious and ecological lines of distinction – from backward mountain dwellers, over hill ethnic groups, to high-caste Hindu hill and plains-dwellers.

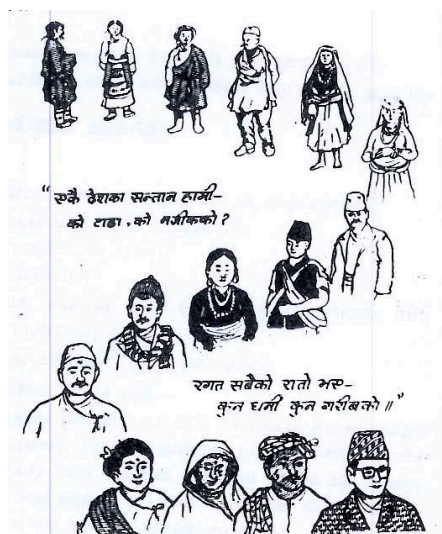


Illustration 2: Stating that “all have the same red blood” this Panchayat textbook page, however, illustrates a hierarchy of development from the mongoloid matwalis in the upper left to the educated man wearing national dress in the bottom right (N. P. Shrestha, 1987 [2044 BS], p. 18)(cf. Pigg 1992, p.502).

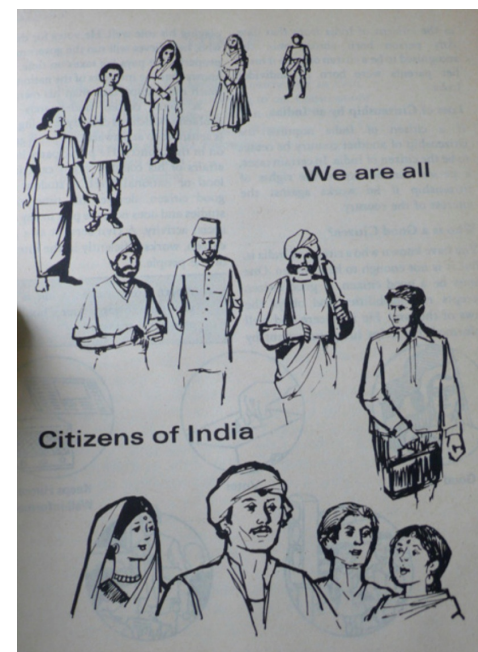


Illustration 3: A similar presentation from an Indian textbook. Here the differences are, however, not so obvious (Muley, Sharma, & Das, 1988, p. 47).

Even in the present-day textbooks, we might trace the ‘imperial debris’ of old hierarchies behind notions of development. Across the present social studies textbooks there is, e.g. a striking amount of emphasis on the problems of drinking (CDC, 2009b, pp. 47-48; 2009c, pp. 50-55). Although presented in the neutral language of a ‘social evil’, this emphasis brings up unwarranted remnants of the earlier use of the ‘alcohol drinkers’ (*matwali*) category as a placeholder for race and/or ethnicity (see also Pigg, 1993, p. 55). It is, obviously, not the high-caste Hindu – supposedly shying alcohol as a polluting substance – that are the target audience for the textbooks’ insistent condemnation

of drinking. Rather, it is the ‘drinking’ Tibeto-Burman population that is the target of moral ridicule (see illustration below). And as education – a major marker of development – as well as the civilizational notions of “good traditional (...) and indigenous concepts” are presented as the remedy for social evils, notions of lacking civilisation and developmental backwardness is once again tied up with their position in the national hierarchy (CDC, 2009c, pp. 51-52).

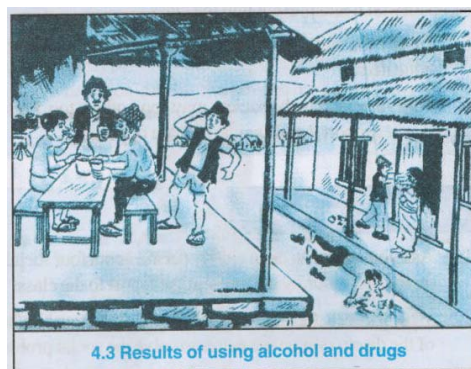


Illustration 4: The results of drinking as illustrated in the present social studies textbook for grade eight (CDC, 2009c, p. 52)

In summary, the notion of development provided a crucial point around which the representation of national space was produced in the Panchayat era. Mapping out national space as a ‘sea of villageness’, the development discourse oriented people towards the crests and the lulls in the ‘waves of development’. The Panchayat discourse thus sought to overwrite earlier forms of difference with a spatio-temporal distinction between development and remoteness. However, this didn’t fully erase earlier hierarchies leaving various ‘imperial debris’ to be taken up in the changing political circumstances after the 1990 ‘people’s

movement’ (*Jana Andolan*) overthrew the Panchayat regime. Furthermore, though some critique of the ‘development’ discourse has surfaced since then (e.g. Fujikura, 2001; Pigg, 1993; Tamang, 2003), political agendas and a steady flow of international development aid has kept the spatial differentiation according to development alive and well – in the present-day school textbooks as well as beyond. Notions of development thus continue to play a crucial role in the spatial organisation of Nepal.

In summary I have, so far, argued that Panchayat schooling provides an important moment in the transformation of the imperial landscape into a more integrated, bordered and uniform national territory. Concomitantly, Panchayat schooling also provides an important moment in the development of a nation-wide language of difference. This language replays elements from the imperial landscape of the past combined with new anthropological and ecological distinctions according to notions of development and backwardness. Due to the unprecedented spatial reach of Panchayat education; the concomitant increase in literacy; and the positive evaluation of ‘school knowledge’ that the combination of education with employment opportunities and notions of development facilitate, we should, I would argue, expect that this language of difference has had a major impact on Nepali society. As such, Panchayat schooling provides a crucial ‘past’ to the contemporary imagination of *Naya Nepal* – a past that in many instances continues as the present for contemporary textbooks. But what about contemporary schooling? In the section below, I provide a brief discussion of developments in the centralised administration of education combined with examples from

contemporary schooling in eastern Nepal. We begin with a small anecdote.

### **Schooling the ‘Infantile Citizen’ as a Moral Agent**

In the grade eight classroom, the teacher begins today’s lesson: “the executive”. Listening to my assistant’s whispering translation, I am taken aback by the degree to which what is taught seems detached from the outside world. It is September 2010, and since the Congress prime minister resigned in July, the Nepali political parties have not been able to agree on a new candidate as the basis for the formation of a new government.<sup>75</sup> Though this political deadlock is all over the news<sup>76</sup>, the teacher proceeds through “the formation of government” following closely the ideal and abstract form in which it is presented in the textbook. “Do you know the constitution,” the teacher asks the pupils when explaining the basis for the formation of the executive. As their “yes” rings through the classroom I wonder what constitution they are referring to – the last constitution from 1991, the interim constitution promulgated after the peace agreement between the Maoist insurgents and the main political parties, or the constitution presently in the making inside the walls of the Constituent Assembly? But it seems to be none of these. The constitution of this class and its lesson in the textbook seems to be a more abstracted and idealized one.

As the bell rings and the pupils start pouring out into the school playground from this lesson on “the executive” no mention has been made, no reference drawn, to neither the current constitution-making

<sup>75</sup> After “nearly seven months of leadership vacuum”, Jhulanath Khanal of CPN (UML) was finally chosen as the new Prime Minister in the beginning of February 2011 (see e.g. Rai, 2011)

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. “How do we get out of this hole?”, Nepali Times 10 September, 2010, p. 4

process nor the political deadlock. The school space is left in the ideal world of the textbook – a world that seems curiously out of sync with the surrounding world. The next day, my assistant and I join the chatting of the teachers in the teachers’ room. Here, another social studies teacher expresses concern with the current political situation: “How can you teach who is the prime minister, when he keeps changing all the time?” she asks rhetorically. Her concerns tell a story of the contemporary political volatility in Nepal, but also about what is deemed appropriate to teach in school and what is not. Unstated, but clear from her comments, you cannot tell the children that the prime minister keeps on changing. This just won’t fit into the ideal world presented in the textbooks, where the constitution is the constitution and the prime minister is the prime minister.



*Illustration 5: Still tending the garden? Painting on the wall of a school near Ilam in eastern Nepal*

The same idealism is reflected in the contemporary textbooks: “Draw a picture that represents an ideal community and explain it”,

“Present a model of an ideal municipality”, “Draw a sketch that shows an ideal community”. These sentences present activities for the pupils reading the social science textbook for grade nine (CDC, 2009b, pp. 3,7,9). The accompanying lessons tell us that “people live in communities” (CDC, 2009b, p. 2) and presents the government of these communities through an introduction to Village Development Committees (VDCs) and municipalities.

On a first reading, the details of these institutions seems very mundane – so and so many members elected, nominations of ‘social workers’, ‘backward classes’, ‘ethnic groups’ and so on. On a second reading, another perspective stands out from these mundane facts and figures. When the student Pawan in lesson two asks the teacher Urmila how the VDC members are elected she readily answers, “they are elected by the citizens who have attained the age of 18 years and have been living in the village development area for at least one year” (CDC, 2009b, p. 4). A conversation is played out and a question is exchanged with the correct answer – the nominal rule for how these things work. But the VDC members are not elected in Nepal. The latest local election in Nepal was held in 1997<sup>77</sup> nine years before the end of the Maoist insurgency, and twelve years before the present edition of the social science textbook was revised in 2009 (see e.g. International Crisis Group, 2006). It is thus, not only the students that “draw a picture that represents an ideal community.” The very textbook that gives the activity does the same.

<sup>77</sup> In 2006 King Gyanendra called for Municipal elections, but with the Maoists controlling of extensive parts of the country, the major political parties boycotting the election, and a voter turnout of only 20% these are rarely counted among the local elections (International Crisis Group, 2006).

What does this mean for the role of schooling in relation to the contemporary political conjuncture in Nepal? We might see schooling, as it is presented above, as a rehearsal of what Laurant Berlant has referred to as ‘infantile citizenship’ (Berlant, 1993). This notion describes the youthful innocence of a naïve, utopian imagination of the nation. The innocence of the infantile citizen lies in marked contrast between the ideal image of the nation that occupies the infantile imagination and the harsh realities of the nation that one encounters outside this imagination. So far the schooling of Nepali children follows Berlant’s notion. But while the infantile citizen in Berlant’s description elicits “scorn and cynicism from ‘knowing’ adults” (Berlant, 1993, p. 399), the school children I met in Ilam seemed to engage the surrounding society from a different position. In the semi-urban public space of Ilam town they showed up, instead, as a sort of ‘moral agents’ clearly visible in their school uniforms in everyday activities and public events. The following vignette illustrates this presence.

One morning, a few day after my arrival in Ilam Bazaar, I found the main square of the town thronged with lines of school children facing a podium at the edge of the square. What was going on? Why were, what seemed to be a substantial part of the town’s school children lined up here? The event turned out to be a public campaign possibly organised by the Election Commission and meant to get the adult citizens of Nepal to re-register onto the electoral roll and get copies of the new voter ID cards with pictures.<sup>78</sup> But none of the pupils

<sup>78</sup> As a consequence of the perceived high level of errors in the electoral roll for the CA elections, the Election Commission has initiated this process that, among other initiatives, will provide voter ID cards with pictures and fingerprints to be used in future elections. The related registration process was ongoing during my stay in

were anywhere near voting age – so why were they there? Apparently, from the signs they had brought they were there to encourage others from the local community to register for the new voter ID and be able to participate in the later elections. Lined up in the square by their teachers, they thus sent out a message of civic engagement to the rest of society. A few days later, an even larger display of school children showed up in the square. This time the occasion was “Children’s Day” – arguably more relevant for their age groups (see picture below). Again, the school children had written “moral” slogans on various signs that were now being carried around displaying the moral integrity of the school children towards the surrounding society.



*Illustration 6: School children in the main square of Ilam*

In these events, the school children seemed less like ‘infantile citizens’ in need of real education from the surrounding society and more like moral agents put out there to change that society. In the

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Nepal (September-November 2010) and the first phase was concluded in January 2011 with a 40% reduction in the list of registered voters (nepalnews.com, 2011).

image of the educated person presented above, they are put out there in their ostensible capacity as ‘developed’ citizens. As another textbook lesson blankly states, “when a person is educated, the level of his/her consciousness increases. It is this personal consciousness which makes a person able to judge what is right and wrong” (CDC, 2009a, p. 72). Across text and practice, today the educated person thus continues to be presented as more conscious and morally superior to the uneducated people of the population (see also Fujikura, 2001). And this is again folded back onto the anthropological differentiation of people. As a present-day textbook for grade five illustrates, school children are imagined as able to disentangle themselves and walk away from the “custom[s] and traditions performed in the past [that] would not be good in [the] present” (CDC, 2005, p. 41). As ‘conscious’ and developed the educated children are thus cast as superior to the cultural bickering of the ‘traditional’ adults (see illustration below).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> For another analysis of the illustration and the lesson that accompanies it see (Caddell, 2005)





Illustration 7: School children leaving a circle of traditionally clad adults (CDC, 2005, p. 38)

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the language of anthropological as well as developmental difference that emerges as a subtext within Panchayat textbooks and in large measure continues into the present. I have argued that this textbook language of difference within comes at a crucial moment in Nepali history and attains a wide scope due to the concomitant and hitherto unseen expansion of the education system as a governmental technology. As notions of development and education are repeatedly folded onto each other across the Panchayat period and into the present, the textbook language of difference, I argue, emerges as a privileged language of politics and civic engagement. Although the educated person her- or himself is cast as a person able to walk away from the anthropological differences of ‘traditional society’, a certain ‘educated’ fluency in anthropological difference nonetheless continues

– as I argue in the following chapter – to mark out the persons that have a political say in relation to the on-going imagination of *Naya Nepal*.

This latter point can be illustrated by a final observation from the Nepali education system. In line with pressure from ‘ethnic’ organisations and recommendations from international donors, there has over the last few years been a movement towards more teaching in the pupils’ ‘mother tongues’ and more ‘local knowledge’ in the curriculum. In relation to the former, new textbooks have been produced for the early classes and (after further pressure) some of these have been distributed to the districts. In the area where I conducted fieldwork, pupils however ubiquitously chose optional English (seen as the language of development *par excellence*) rather than e.g. Limbu language. With regards to ‘local knowledge’ – a priority point for e.g. the Limbu organisation Kirat Yakthum Chumlung – a similar situation presented itself. While education bureaucrats in Kathmandu understandably stated that the presentation of ‘local knowledge’ – now valued twenty per-cent in the curriculum for ‘social studies’ – should be a local responsibility, local ethnic representatives pointed to the teachers to produce the materials for such lessons and the teachers in turn pointed toward the curriculum materials centre in Kathmandu. While ‘local’, ‘indigenous’ knowledge was thus praised in principle across the board, in reality other, more centralised forms of knowledge emerged as more important for the ‘infantile citizens’ of *Naya Nepal*.

## **Chapter 6: Ethnic Fluency in *Naya Nepal***

Today, the governmental imagination of Nepal is in transition. After the 1990 people's movement (Jana Andolan), the royal rule of the Panchayat regime was abandoned, the political parties reinstated and electoral processes reinstituted. With the promulgation of a new constitution in 1991, multiparty democracy had officially arrived. Nonetheless, governmental alliances were continuously shifting and governments changed rapidly usually re-shuffling a limited number of familiar faces from the political elite. Six years later, a Maoist 'insurgency' broke out in the western hills. What looked like a spatially limited uprising to start with emerged as a serious threat to national government by the turn of the millennium. Violent clashes between central state forces and Maoist rebels ensued, leaving many dead behind. In 2005, the king utilised the occasion of the 'insurgency' to take over central government. Finally, in 2006, a peace accord was made between the central political parties and the Maoists. A second people's movement (Jana Andolan II) led by this coalition managed to oust the king.

Subsequently, the central political parties and the Maoists initiated a peace process evolving around the integration of the two armies (the central Nepal Army and the Maoist Peoples Liberation Army) and the formulation of a new constitution through an elected constituent assembly (CA). As discussions before and during the constituent assembly developed, Nepal was declared a republic. The king was removed from his palace in central Kathmandu and stripped of his title. With increasing pressure from a variety of organisations representing formerly marginalised ethnic and caste groups, it was also decided that Nepal is to become a federation. In the interim constitution

that was promulgated to provide the temporary framework for government until the CA had finished a new constitution, Nepal was thus refashioned as a "Federal, Democratic, Republican State" (UNDP, 2009, p. 56). The CA, however, did not manage to fulfil its mandate even after two extensions of its initial two-year period. In late May 2012, the CA's final tenure ran out in the middle of fervent negotiations among the country's political elites. The major question of how to reorganise the national territory into federal states seemed to be the one that broke the CA's back in the final hour. At the time of writing, no alternative solution to the question of formal governmental arrangements for a *Naya Nepal* has been given.

In this chapter, I look at the contemporary politics of difference in the open-ended contemporary situation of government in Nepal. I argue that the folding of a language of difference related to development, education and awareness onto an imperial landscape of ecological and anthropological difference that I illustrated in the Panchayat and present-day textbooks in the preceding chapter provides the grounds for a contemporary claims to 'ethnic' difference. And I show how the widespread fetishisation of education substantially influences the language through which one can engage in a politics of difference today. As claims to 'ethnic' difference have become increasingly legitimate in contemporary Nepal, the way these claims can be presented relies on a certain language of the 'educated' or 'aware' person. What emerges from this is thus a sort of *academic politics*. Here fluency in a specific language of ethnic claims becomes, concomitantly, a marker of development and awareness. This fluency, in turn, structures who can legitimately engage in the contemporary politics of difference and who cannot. In conclusion, the open-ended

contemporary conjuncture might be seen both as harbouring a potential for increased local autonomy within future federal states and as producing a refashioned division between a somewhat changed political elite and a large, backward and unaware population.

In the following I develop the connections I see between notions of academic awareness and the politics of ethnic difference. I do so, first in relation to contemporary ethnic self-fashioning, mapping and classification in the contemporary conjuncture in general and then in relation to one of the most prominent claims to federal stateness: Limbuwan. I begin with a brief outline of the contemporary combinations between notions of development and refashioned forms of anthropological difference.

#### Differences Refashioned and Recombined

(...) we have to look for a new Nepali nationalism on the faces of all kinds of Nepalis, their lifestyles and cultures.<sup>80</sup>

Since 1990, new constellations of difference and representations of the national territory and space have sprung up in Nepal. A large number of organizations seeking to represent formerly marginalized groups have emerged pushing for new ways to articulate old differences (see e.g. Gellner, 1997; Gellner, 2007, 2009; Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka, & Whelpton, 1997; Onta, 2006). By bringing women, low castes and 'indigenous' peoples into an armed struggle with the central government, the Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006 similarly altered the old representations of difference. As the insurgency ended and a peace process was initiated, these new representations of difference have been connected to ideas of territorial reorganisation with the

<sup>80</sup> UML Politbureau member and Coordinator of the Adivasi Janajati Caucus Prithvi Subba Gurung (interviewed in Dhungel & Adhikari, 2012).

prospect of Nepal becoming a federal state. Especially during the last four years of negotiations in the Constituent Assembly, federalism has become one of the most hotly debated issues<sup>81</sup> in Nepali politics, capturing the high expectations of a multitude 'indigenous' groups towards a 'new Nepal' as well as the luring anxieties of others (see e.g. International Crisis Group, 2011). In this new situation, old categories of difference are re-evoked and re-valued from a multitude of positions in Nepali society, new connections have been made and the future territorial organisation of the landscape is openly contested.

With the fall of the Panchayat regime, categories of differentiation that were essential parts of the pre-Panchayat governmental gaze are being re-articulated with a new valuation and in new combinations with continued notions of development. Through the discursive intervention of a broad range of 'ethnic' organisations, the former *matwali jat* ('alcohol-drinking sub-castes') have been refashioned as *adivasi janajati*. *Adivasi* is a Sanskrit term that is typically translated as 'first settlers' and is widely used in India when referring to the so-called scheduled tribes (see e.g. P. Sharma, 2008, p. 3). *Janajati*, on the other hand, is a Nepali neologism. While it is often translated as 'nationalities' its use in relation to internationally supported discussions of 'indigenous peoples' has connected it to the globalised concept of 'indigeneity' (Onta, 2006, p. 311; 2011). In 2002, official state recognition was given to the term in the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act that listed 59 *adivasi janajati* communities in Nepal. Together with

<sup>81</sup> The issue of how many states there should be and on what basis they should be delineated recently resulted in the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, when the fourth extension of its tenure ran out on 27 May 2012, before a new constitution was promulgated. As new elections are slated for being planned for November 2012, a range of 'ethnic' political representatives are discussing whether to form a united front for federalism (see e.g. The Himalayan Times, 2012).



continuing public discourse (see e.g. Onta, 2011) and the utilisation of the term as part of the basis for an elaborate quota system for the 2008 Constituent Assembly election, the NFDIN has supported the refashioning of the former *matwalis* into *janajatis*.

This conceptual shift has facilitated new connections between notions of ethnic and ecological difference and notions of economic development. While development assistance to Nepal, as described above, exploded in the 80s it has remained at a consistent high since then with many donors encouraged by the seemingly positive developments towards a more democratic political system.<sup>82</sup> However, in line with global changes, the developmental discourse in Nepal has changed substantially from the Panchayat period. While the Panchayat discourse sought, at least superficially, to dissolve earlier difference in a 'sea' of development the focus is now very much on 'targeted' development directed exactly at the formerly marginalised groups now typically articulated in terms of 'caste', 'gender' and 'ethnicity'.<sup>83</sup> Under the overall agenda of developing Nepal as an inclusive democracy, the inclusion of these groups in societal decision-making has become tantamount to development efforts. Thus today, development works through and reinforces, rather than overwrites, 'ethnic' and other forms of differentiation.

The 'old' development discourse's focus on physical infrastructure and remoteness is still in practice, though. During my

<sup>82</sup> Since 1990 development assistance to Nepal has been consistently high. Measured in 2009 US\$ it averaged 553 million US\$ per year in the 90s and 589 million US\$ per year in the 2000s. (Source: World Development Indicators 2011).

<sup>83</sup> These observations regarding the current 'development regime' (see Ludden, 2005a) in Nepal are based on my own work in the sector in 2007-2008 combined with the reading of a variety of development reports from around that time (see e.g. WB, 2006).

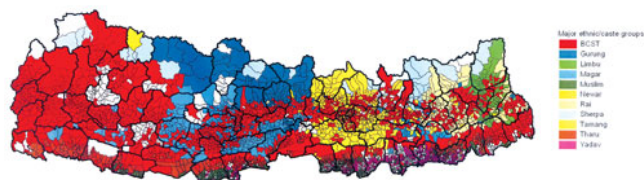
fieldwork, people often remarked that I was lucky to be working in eastern Nepal. In accordance with the traditional development mapping, they pointed out that this was a 'developed' region with good roads. However, the Panchayat periods' representation of 'remote' villages as 'backward' is changing. For the 'ethnic' organizations, the refashioning of the former 'sub-castes' in terms of 'indigeneity' typically involves their rooting in specific and often 'remote' places.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, the representation of remote villages as underdeveloped is increasingly being supplemented with representations of the same places as culturally 'authentic'. Thus, many people would ask why I was conducting what they perceived as my 'research on the Limbus' in a semi-urban environment. After all, they implied, such environments are characterised by a diversity of groups and cultural influences. A place like remote Panchthar or Taplejung, by contrast, would let me encounter a more 'authentic' Limbu culture and identity.

Reflecting these shifts in the language of ethnic difference and development, mapped representations of Nepali national territory are also changing. Since 1990, census operations have changed with the increased recognition of the country's ethnic and linguistic diversity. The 1991 census was the first nation-wide census to enumerate ethnicity – collecting district population figures for fifty-nine different groups (P. Sharma, 2008, p. 8). No longer 'fuzzy' in the eyes of the state, the new enumerated communities were quickly taken up by prominent Nepali cartographers and population specialists (especially Harka Gurung, see Gurung, 1994, 1996, 1998).<sup>85</sup> The result is a new

<sup>84</sup> See (Handler, 1996; Ludden, 2003b; Malkki, 1992) for discussions of the dynamics of 'rooting'.

<sup>85</sup> See (Kaviraj, 2010, pp. 187-201) on 'fuzzy' and enumerated communities in India. See also (Cohn, 1987b; Kaviraj, 1997; Scott, 1998).

kind of ‘mosaic’ map providing nation-wide representations of space in which a multitude of colours or patterns display the ethnic diversity of the country. The 2001 census provided data for 100 groups with increased spatial disaggregation down to the Village Development Committee level. Combined with powerful developments in Geographical Information System (GIS) technology, this has enabled the production of even more elaborate, complex ‘mosaic’ maps over the last decades (cf. e.g. Gurung, 2006; P. Sharma, 2008) further pushing the boundaries of mapped representations of the ethnic diversity within Nepali territory (see map below).<sup>86</sup>



Map 3: A ‘mosaic’ map of Nepal’s population (from Pitamber Sharma’s atlas reviewed in *Nepali Times*, 2008)

This emergence and success of the ‘mosaic’ maps marks a departure from the mapped representations of the country in earlier times. While the *Nepal: Atlas of Economic Development* (1980) was apparently one of the most significant maps during the Panchayat era, ‘mosaic’ maps increasingly supplement such ‘development’ maps. Over the last two decades, the changes in both discursive and mapped representations of the differences between people and places have, in

<sup>86</sup> One could liken the innovations in GIS technology with development of the cadastral map in the nineteenth century in the powerful effects it has on the way we can territorialize a certain select picture of a complex reality (see Scott, 1998, pp. 1-52).

other words, been substantial. While the diversity of the central Himalayas has obviously been recognised at least since Prithvi Narayan Shah’s conquest, it is today more visible and ready at hand for discussions of Nepal’s future than before. And, with the widespread diffusion of mosaic maps, the complex array of cultural differences are explicitly visualised within the territorial borders of the nation-state. As such, the present recasting of largely imperial categories of difference provides the grounds unto which imaginations of and proposals for the territorial reorganisation of the country are brought forward.

### Mapping Federal Futures

In 2007, after pressure from ethnic and *madeshi*<sup>87</sup> leaders, the first amendment to the interim constitutions inserted federalism as a binding principle for the Constituent Assembly’s reorganisation of the Nepali state structure. After the ball was given up for the delineation of future federal states, a host of different ‘federal’ maps began circulating (see maps 4 and 5).<sup>88</sup> These maps differ substantially. Based on a variety of different criteria, the proposed number of federal units e.g. ranges between three and fifteen (P. Sharma et al., 2009). Even within the purview of the Constituent Assembly (CA), the sub-committee in charge ended up proposing two different models – one delineating fourteen states, another six.<sup>89</sup> Among the political parties, the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) – the biggest party in the CA –

<sup>87</sup> The term *Madeshi* refers to the non-hill-origin population from Nepal’s southern plains.

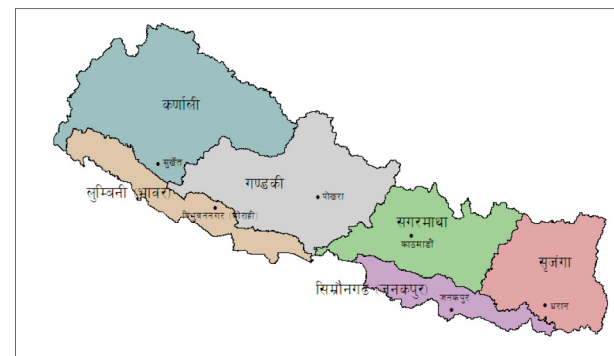
<sup>88</sup> The Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (CCD, now renamed as ‘Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal’) has compiled a range of these maps. These federal maps originate with a variety of organisations, political parties and individuals. See also (P. Sharma, Khanal, & Tharu, 2009).

<sup>89</sup> As the question was later placed onto an ‘expert committee’ outside the CA, two proposals were again produced – one suggesting eleven states, the other six.

have spoken for a solution with many, ethnically based states from early on while the older United Marxist Leninists and Nepali Congress have been more hesitant, emphasising the need to keep the Nepali nation integrated and the federal states economically viable. Providing another new force in formal politics the 'Madeshi' parties – representing the non-hill-origin population of the southern Nepali plains – are pushing for the integration of the southern plains into one state running the length of the country under the slogan '*ek Madesh, ek Pradesh*' (one Madesh, one state). Adding proposals from various individuals, the sum is obviously a confusing jungle of proposals feeding onto the on-going politics of territorial reorganisation.



*Map 4: A proposal from the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists).*



Map 5: One of two proposals from the CA committee for state restructuring.

While most of the proposed maps reflect a territorial organisation of 'ethnic' differences in some way, federal restructuring however also bring notions of development into renewed connections with the national territory. While proposals for federal set-ups with many states typically rely on histories of 'indigenous' belonging to different areas, proposals with fewer states often rely on notions of development, resources, and economic viability. Working both on the 'mosaic' mapping of Nepal and on the evaluation of proposed models (including his own), geographer Pitamber Sharma occupies a central position on the 'development' side of the debate. In one of his publication Sharma states that "federalism should provide the basis for regional development" and that it "has to be conceived of as an exercise in addressing the multiplicity of issues that form the agenda of Nepal's development" (P. Sharma, 2008, p. 83). The idea that Nepal's demographic 'mosaic' and proposed federal models can be made the object of "dispassionate analysis" (P. Sharma, 2008: back cover) leaves the door open for the notions of development to re-enter the politics of territorial re-structuring.

As Pitamber Sharma's involvement illustrates, the new federal representations of Nepali national territory take part in a politics of space that is heavily infused with notions of academic and scientific authority. Committees and commissions, prominent academics (P. Sharma, 2008; P. Sharma et al., 2009), and international development agencies evaluated federal proposals in terms that often bring notions of 'development' back in. Sharma's involvement is just an example of this tendency, which is also supported by the involvement of development agencies. The UNDP-supported Centre for Constitutional Dialogue for instance produced a paper (unpublished, but seemingly widely circulated) which provided "Provincial Profiles" for the 14 states suggested in the CA. The main bulk of this profiling regards the usual development indicators. On the other side of the debate stand other academics such as the Limbu population geographer Balkrishna Mabuhang – a former president of NEFIN, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (Mabuhang, 2009). For them, ethnic histories and population statistics describing the marginalisation of ethnic groups by high-caste Hindus are more important for the evaluation of the federal proposals, but the notion of academic, scientific grounding of discussions are the same. The mapping of a federal future for Nepal illustrates the contemporary combination of notions of development and 'ethnic' difference that circulate within a field of academic politics. In the following, I analyse this combination in further detail as it is expressed in the contemporary 'ethnic' refashioning.

#### **Ethnic Fluency in Contemporary Politics**

In the shift from *matwali* to *janajati*, 'ethnic' identity has become an important point of self-fashioning. I repeatedly encountered this among my relatively affluent informants in Kathmandu. One colleague, during

my first stay in Nepal in 2007, pointed out that he was not an ordinary *chettri* (the high, 'warrior' caste in the Hindu hierarchy). He was *Khas* (the old name for the original migrants into eastern Nepal) he said, and thus a *matwali chettri* – an alcohol-drinker of the warrior caste and hence, in some sense, as 'ethnic' as the other *janajati* groups in Nepal. On my next visit in 2010, several friends and informants from the Kirat groups (they were Rai and Limbu) made a somewhat similar gesture. They all referred to their supposedly common ethnic trait of being loyal to their friends, but short-tempered. Several of them relayed a common proverb jokingly stating that a three-inch cut by the traditional curved *khukuri* knife was merely what could happen, when one was kidding around. None of them, however, acted particularly short-tempered when I was around. As I later realised, their ethnic self-characterisations replayed central elements from colonial ethnographies of the Kirat 'tribes'.

These are, obviously, merely anecdotal illustrations of the contemporary life of the language of 'ethnic' difference in Nepal. Nonetheless, I will argue that they fit into a larger trend around 'ethnic' fluency that tie the contemporary mosaic mapping of Nepal together with a more on-going redistribution of 'voice' in the contemporary politics of difference. Here, the ability to identify, characterise, list, enumerate, and categorise 'ethnic' differences becomes as a central marker of contemporary 'awareness' and 'development'. With this, fluency in a specific 'academic', 'educated' language of ethnic history and diversity tends to become a criteria for entry into the on-going politics of territorial restructuring. Hence, in some sense, one has to 'speak like a state' in order to engage the state and be taken seriously.

At an inter-personal level, I experienced the contemporary dynamics of ethnic fluency in repeated encounters with people eager to map out ethnic groups in the area, explain their relations, population numbers, hint at their histories and ‘cultural traits’ etc. How many Limbu’s lived in Ilam district? Were they more concentrated in the Taplejung or Panchthar? Which groups should be sorted under the Kirat designation? Many informants quickly jumped at the opportunity to engage in lengthy discussions on questions such as these. While the overtly essential notions of ‘ethnicity’ that such discussion relied on would bring nervous twitches to even moderately constructionist students of anthropology, I found that the pivotal part of this ‘found ethnography’ was the way in which it seemed to work as a marker of ‘educated’ fluency in a specific language of ethnic difference.<sup>90</sup> This fluency resonated very well with a host of exercises that are included in the present-day social studies textbooks. These repeatedly encourage the students to ‘map’ their environment, often along ‘ethnic’ or other cultural lines (cf. e.g. CDC, 2009a, p. 40; CDC, 2009b, p. 26; see also Middleton & Shneiderman, 2008).

While such practices of ethnic mapping might have also been prevalent before 1990, the contemporary ‘mosaic’ maps obviously provide them with resonance at a national scale and the federalism agenda gives them an increased salience in connection to centralised territorial politics. Outside school textbooks and ethnographic experiences, we can re-find the contemporary practice of ethnic characterisation and classification in the wider public. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), an umbrella

<sup>90</sup> See Christopher Townsend Middleton’s recent dissertation for a related discussion of ‘found anthropology’ in Darjeeling (Middleton, 2010).

organisation for a range of ‘indigenous peoples organisations’, e.g. quickly combined the 59 recently classified *janajati* groups with tried and tested notions of development in a new classification. Here the fifty-nine groups are ordered according to region and development: the former indexing mountain, hill, inner terai (plains) and terai and the latter endangered, highly marginalised, marginalised, disadvantaged, and advantaged (see e.g. Onta, 2006, p. 313).<sup>91</sup> As was probably intended, the resulting table has been widely used in relation to national and international development projects in Nepal.

### The Academic Politics of Limbuwan

The demand for a Limbuwan state in eastern Nepal has been one of the earliest and most vocal statehood demands expressed in relation to the agenda of turning the country into a federal state. In the following, I illustrate how the academic politics of place-making and local autonomy is presently evolving around the demand for Limbuwan. I argue that this academic politics is productive for the attainment of a more local autonomy as it connects the Limbuwan claims to globalised notions of indigenous rooting in the landscape. However, towards the end of the chapter, I argue, that this academic politics is concomitantly bordered by notions of ethnic fluency and national territory in ways that might end up repeating a powerful differentiation between ‘developed’ and ‘backward’ people as well as reducing possibilities of cross-border cooperation. I begin with an anecdote illustrating one of the many ways in which the ‘academic’ side of contemporary ethnic politics unveiled itself during my fieldwork.

When my initial interest in eastern Nepal began some years ago, I read the British anthropologist Lionel Caplan’s classical book *Land*

<sup>91</sup> See also [www.nefin.org.np](http://www.nefin.org.np).

*and Social Change in East Nepal: A Study of Hindu-Tribal Relations* (1970). At that time, I did not expect that this 40 year old book would turn up again much later, during my doctoral fieldwork in the area. The next encounter was in eastern Nepal in 2010, during an interview with Mohan - a local leader of the “Limbu indigenous peoples’ organization” Kirat Yakthum Chumlung (KYC). Interviewing Mohan about the present-day movement for a Limbuwan federal state, I became aware, firstly, of numerous historical references often going as far back as to the official ‘birth’ of Nepal with Prithvi Narayan Shahs conquests in the later eighteenth century, and secondly, of the similarities between his perspective on the history of Limbuwan and the one presented by Caplan’s book. Further into the conversation direct references to Caplan’s book came up in relation to arguments about *kipat* land tenure, and by the end of the interview, Mohan showed me numerous copies of the book - in Nepali translation - piled up in the back of his small shop.

The experience took me by surprise. I somehow expected such academic discourse to be situated ‘at home’ separated from the empirical, political reality of ‘the field’. Suddenly, this separation seemed untenable as I was being fed back the same academic discourse that shaped my initial perspectives on the social and political situation of eastern Nepal.<sup>92</sup>

When I returned to Kumar’s shop a year later, I asked him more in depth about the Caplan book. As it turns out, the book was translated and printed by the Centre for Ethnic and Alternative Development

<sup>92</sup> The experience somewhat resembles the ‘found’ anthropology Christopher Townsend Middleton describes in his study of the production of ethnic subjects across the border in Darjeeling (Middleton, 2010). For Middleton, ‘found’ anthropology describes “those forms of anthropological knowledge being circulated, produced, and practiced in the social world beyond the academy” (Middleton, 2010, p. 8).

Studies (CEADS, a Kathmandu based research and advocacy organization) and distributed to KYC members and other interested people in connection to a seminar in the area. The seminar was conducted by Balkrishna Mabuhang and Mahendra Lawoti - two Limbu academics. Lawoti is currently working as an associate professor of political science at Western Michigan University while Mabuhang is professor of population studies at Kathmandu’s Tribhuvan University. Lawoti has written extensively on the exclusion of ‘indigenous peoples’ from politics and public institutions in Nepal and has repeatedly argued for ‘ethnic federalism’ as part of a consociational approach to creating an inclusive Nepal (Lawoti, 2005, 2007, 2008; see also Lijphart, 1977). Mabuhang, the former general secretary NEFIN, presently serves as the chairman of CEADS. He is, as described above, one of the main ‘academic’ spokes-persons in favour of an ethnically-based federal model for Nepal and thus a Limbuwan state (see Bhattachan, 2010; Mabuhang, 2009). Mabuhang has also taken direct part in the production of a KYC proposal for an autonomous Limbuwan state.<sup>93</sup>

The anecdote illustrates the existence of a certain degree of ‘intellectual activism’ among ‘indigenous’ academics. This is hardly surprising. In a study of the reconstruction of Limbu local history, Grégoire Schlemmer has even proposed a name – ‘indigenist’ – for this sort of academics working on “their own” ‘indigenous’ belonging (Schlemmer, 2003/2004, p. 120). However, the anecdote also indicates one way in which the academic politics that the ‘indigenists’ are part of is distributed among a much broader range of people as a specific

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Balkrishna Mabuhang, Kathmandu, September 2011; Interview with KYC president Arjun Limbu, Kathmandu, August 2011.

language in which one can and ought to engage contemporary politics. This language reiterates specific elements of both ‘indigenist’ and – as the anecdote above illustrates – foreign academic texts. Hence, what I analyse in the following is a widespread discourse on Limbuwan as an ‘indigenous’ place that is saturated with academic narratives and supported occasionally with direct references to academic texts circulated – sometimes physically, sometimes electronically; sometimes at length, sometimes in bits and pieces – among a broad range of people.

#### **Indigenous History: Predating the Nation, Bordering Limbuwan**

*(...) we raise the issues of Limbuwan on the basis of the historical background (...) [and a] certain autonomy before introducing the land reform act in 1964. So, we have to be treated as a people of autonomous areas, you know.*<sup>94</sup>

As the quote above suggests, ‘indigenous’ history has emerged as a major battleground for the academic politics of Limbuwan, not just a specialist concern. During my first stay in Ilam, the local schools were e.g. shut down for a day or two by the student wing of the Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC). The students presented a range of demands for the decentralisation of education, but among these one stood out. The students opposed the use of a specific economics book in the local college on the grounds that it painted a misleading picture of Limbu history. The book stated that Limbus had migrated into, rather than fled, the area when Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered it in the late-eighteenth century. It seemed that the students would not let this mistake pass without public action.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Arjun Limbu, Kathmandu, August 2011

As I analyse below, the contemporary discourse on Limbu history is characterised by an academic language that often refers back to the work of Iman Singh Chemjong. Chemjong, is probably both the first and most important ‘indigenist’ of the Limbus (Gaenszle, 2002; Schlemmer, 2003/2004). He was born in Darjeeling in 1904, went to high school in Kalimpong and college in Calcutta.<sup>95</sup> According to his main historical book, *Kirat Itihas* (1948) (translated and “enlarged” as *History and Culture of Kirat People* (1967)), Chemjong’s father – a Christian minister – encouraged Chemjong to study Kirat script already in 1916. After the father’s death in 1928, Chemjong returned to the hills to teach Limbu and Lepcha script in Darjeeling and Sikkim and was later appointed revenue inspector in Sikkim. In 1952 he travelled to East Nepal and, according to Gaenszle, “it seems that he increasingly got involved in the political struggle of the Limbu in Nepal after the downfall of the Rana autocracy” (Gaenszle, 2002, p. 337). In 1961 the Nepali king Tribhuvan invited Chemjong to take up a position as “Specialist in Kirat Language and Literature” at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu. He held this position until his retirement in 1975 and died the same year.

Among the Limbu representatives I talked to, Chemjong’s work on the history and culture of the Kirat people (mainly focused on the Limbus) was seen as foundation of Limbu history. In the words of KYC president Arjun Limbu:

Iman Singh Chemjong (...) collected whatever he [could] get and he published in the book, you know. So now, we have to find out what

<sup>95</sup> The following brief biography relies mainly on (Gaenszle, 2002, pp. 336-337).

is right and what is wrong and we consider that as the foundation of our history, because on his works we can advance our research.<sup>96</sup>

Among foreign academics, Chemjong's historical approach has been characterised as "imaginative," "speculative," and "hypothetical", but the importance of his writing for establishing "a new discourse on Kirati identity which is no longer mythological but academic in character" has been recognised "in spite of his methodological shortcomings" (Gaenszle, 2002, p. 340; see also Schlemmer, 2003/2004).<sup>97</sup>

Beyond many academic references to Chemjong's work (e.g. Caplan, 2000; K. Pradhan, 1991; Sagant, 1996; C. Subba, 1995; T. B. Subba, 1999) Chemjong has also become a somewhat symbolical figure in Limbu identity politics.<sup>98</sup> In 2003, Chemjong's main book, *The History and Culture of the Kirat People* was published in a fourth edition by the KYC. The book is a mixture of (relatively) chronological historical chapters (covering the 'epic' period, the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century, and the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century) and more ethnographic explorations of Kirat culture. The text relies mainly on a mixture of British colonial sources, some Indian scholars, and unpublished Kirat/Limbu manuscripts (Chemjong, 2003, pp. 244-247; see also Gaenszle, 2002). Chemjong places great emphasis on the accounts of the European authors, most importantly the British colonial resident in Kathmandu between 1833 and 1844, Brian Hodgson, whom Chemjong quotes stating that:

The Kirati on account of their distinctly traceable antiquity as a nation and the peculiar structure of their language are perhaps the most interesting of all the Himalayan races. (Hodgson quoted in Chemjong, 2003, p. 1)

This, and a range of other texts by Chemjong are currently circulated widely on the internet with or without references.<sup>99</sup> Recently, the Facebook page "LIMBU" e.g. featured the following post informing its approximately 2000 followers of Limbu ancient history:

(I was going through LIMBUS at Wikipedia and I tracked few sentences for you :) Guess it will be useful.) The Kirant are aboriginal tribe of Nepal and also, the Kirat were the earliest inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. Nepal (Kathmandu valley) is a very ancient country, which has been ruled by many dynasties. Among them, the Kirat rule is taken as a very significant one, being the longest period that extended from pre-historic to historic period. In ancient Hindu scriptures, Nepal is referred as the "Kirat Desh" or "the Land of Kirats".<sup>100</sup>

The post is interesting, as it circulates a history that roots the Limbus not only in ancient history but also in the centre of Nepali national space – Kathmandu valley. It refers to a widespread story about the Kirat kings of ancient central Nepal<sup>101</sup> that finds support mainly in Chemjong's book.

Chemjong's story recounts thirty generations of Kirat rulers from the first king Banashur, over the prominent king Yalamba to the last

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Arjun Limbu, Kathmandu, August 2011.

<sup>97</sup> It should be noted that my objective with this text is not an evaluation of Chemjong's academic credentials. I leave this to people more knowledgeable of Limbu culture and history (such as Schlemmer and Gaenszle) and focus instead on the political productivity of the discourse in which Chemjong's book takes part in terms of giving Limbuwan an authentic 'indigenous' history.

<sup>98</sup> Chemjong is e.g. presented by Kirat Yakthung Chumlung's homepage in line with the Limbu personalities of Sirijunga and Phalgunanda (see [www.chumlung.org.np](http://www.chumlung.org.np)) and he is celebrated annually on his January 1 anniversary both in Nepal and India (see also Rapacha, 2009, pp. 70-71).

<sup>99</sup> See e.g. different entries on <http://www.kiratisaathi.com>, entries such as "History of Limbuwan" and "Limbuwan Gorkha War" on Wikipedia, and pages such as "Limbu" and "The Limbus Collection" (each followed by app. 2000 persons) on Facebook.

<sup>100</sup> Posted on LIMBU Facebook page 15 February 2012 (retrieved same date). The administration behind the page is unknown to the author, but its information pages refers to the website of Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (KYC, [www.chumlung.org.np](http://www.chumlung.org.np)) and reprints the information from that page at length. I have not been able to find the mentioned Wikipedia page nor the exact same wording in related Wikipedia pages.

<sup>101</sup> The story has, e.g. found its way into the Wikipedia entry for the "History of Nepal" even though it definitely isn't part of the official 'national' history of the country.



king Gasti who was driven out of the Kathmandu valley by the Lichchhavis in the 4th century AD (Chemjong, 2003, pp. 5-16).<sup>102</sup> While the typical national ‘time-in-space’ of Nepali history begins with the Lichchhavis – of not with Prithvi Narayan Shah himself – Chemjong’s story predates this with thirty generations of non-Hindu Kirat rulers situated squarely in the centre of present-day National territory.<sup>103</sup> While not directly countering the Nepali ‘national’ history of space, the story of the thirty Kirat kings tactically circumvents this history. By presenting the Kirat as ‘indigenous’ not only to Nepali national space but to the very centre of it, the story also implicitly undermines the lingering representation of this space as ‘Hindu’.

Another of Chemjong’s stories tells of how the victory of ten Limbu chiefs (*sardar*) gave birth to Limbuwan in Eastern Nepal. This story, again, seems to circulate widely. Santosh, a Limbu historian and KYC central committee member told me the story as follows:

There were eight sadars [chiefs] and the leader of the eight sadars was Sawargen Yetan [...]. The society wasn’t called Limbu at that time. After that ten [other] sadars came from north and south – all during the agricultural period. And there was a battle between the eight sadars and the ten sadars. The ten sadars were immigrants from north and south and the eight were from this region and a battle between them took place. Then the ten sadars wished to pray to win the battle over the eight sadars, with the use of their weapons - bows and arrows. After that the battle began and they won over the eight sadars. Then the ten sadars made the decision, at Amde Panzung,<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Other accounts count 29 kings beginning with Yalamba.

<sup>103</sup> Chemjong even adds that the first Lichchhavi king Nemikh was himself a Kirat who had “adopted Hinduism” (Chemjong, 2003, p. 16).

<sup>104</sup> Chemjong refers to this as “Amde Pojoma” (Chemjong, 2003, p. 50).

because they won the battle using bows and arrows, to name the region Li-abu-wan-sing.<sup>105</sup>

While the story of the Kirat kings of central Nepal connected Limbu indigeneity to Nepali national history, this story on the contrary provides a foundational history of Limbuwan that is *distinct* from the ‘national’ history of Nepal – supporting the notion of Limbuwan as a separate ‘indigenous’ territory.

Describing the “emergence of the name ‘Limbuwan’” (Chemjong, 2003, p. 51), Chemjong’s version of the story binds this ‘indigenous’ Limbuwan territory within concrete geographical borders. Chemjong writes:

After their victory, [the ten Limbu chiefs] assembled at their holy place, consulted and fixed the boundaries of the conquered land. They fixed the northern boundary in Tibet; the southern boundary in the Indian plain at Jalal Garh near Purnea; the eastern boundary at river Teesta and the western boundary at river Dudkoshi. (Chemjong, 2003, p. 51)

This notion of the territorial borders of Limbuwan: from that Arun (and Dudkoshi) river to the Teesta river is repeated ubiquitously almost as a mantra in contemporary claims for a Limbuwan state. One Limbu representative e.g. referred to Limbu oral tradition to bring about the same point stating:

(...) we use these terms during our funeral rites. We say we have brought this water from Tista and Arun [rivers] and the mountain and the sea and give this to you [i.e. to the soul of deceased]. (...) we can proudly claim the historical boundaries [of Limbuwan] by referring to these chants.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Limbu historian and KYC central member, Ilam, September 2010.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with KYC member and historian, Ilam, September 2010.

Hence, the concrete and presumably lasting character of the Teesta and Arun/Dudhkoshi river valleys provides a substance to the bordering of Limbuwan that cuts across time and connects distant - even mythical - history with present-day politics.

This territorialisation of Limbuwan across history is also repeated in contemporary political practice. The Federal Limbuwan State Council (Lingden) has e.g. organised a range of marches that trace out specific lines in the landscape of Limbuwan.<sup>107</sup> One march, e.g. led to the Koshi river barrage. Here the south-eastern corner of Limbuwan territory was marked out by placing flags on the barrage structure and connections to the contemporary territorial politics were emphasised with the burning of symbols of the “unitary state” by the river (see photo below). Another march made its way from the plains town Itahari and up to a place near Dharan at the edge of the hills. Here, Bijaypur, an ancient capital of the Sen Empire is supposed to have been. According to Chemjong, the Sen Empire relied strongly on the Limbus and it is therefore included in contemporary references to Limbuwan. What is striking about these two marches is the way in which they are only intelligible if seen in relation to the ‘indigenous’ history of Limbuwan. They support the notion of academic politics as they rely, fundamentally, on a certain level of ‘ethnic’ fluency in the territorial history of Limbuwan to be understood.

<sup>107</sup> My description of these marches relies on information and pictures received from Kumar Lingden, the leader of FLSC (Lingden) whom I interviewed in Kathmandu in the autumn of 2011.



*Illustration 8: The FLSC rally to the Koshi barrage. Photo by Kumar Lingden.*

Connections to indigenous history come up repeatedly even when I interviewed Limbu representatives explicitly about contemporary territorial politics. When I e.g. asked the leader of the political party Federal Limbuwan State Council,<sup>108</sup> Kumar Lingden, about the most recent developments in the parliamentary politics of federalism his answer was one long reference to eighteenth century Nepal:

(...) Nepal was a federal country in history. (...) So, what we are going to now, federalisation of Nepal, is not actually new to Nepal. Nepal was, in the history, a federal country. At the same time, east of Saptakoshi-Arun land the name was Limbuwan and it was a federal state. In Bikram Sambat 1831, 1780-something, the Gorkha king's army and Limbuwan's army fought on the bank of the Arun river and the war was equal and, at final, a treaty was done between Limbuwan and the Gorkha king (...) in the treaty, the main condition was for Limbuwan to stay [as an] autonomous region, autonomous state. So,

<sup>108</sup> The Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC) is a Limbu-oriented political party. In 2008 FLSC split into two parties, one led by Lingden, the other by Palungwa. Only Lingden's branch chose to contest the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections and did so under the Federal Democratic National Forum (FDNF) – an ‘umbrella’ party for ethnic/federal groups. The FDNF won 2 seats in the 601 seat in the CA one of which was given to the FLSC (see e.g. International Crisis Group, 2011).

(...) Limbuwan was an autonomous state (...) 1780-1960 (...). And, around 1960, '65, the late king Gyanendra's father, Mahendra, he captured all power and dismissed the treaty of Limbuwan and Nepal. Then, finally Limbuwan was "uniterised" and that is just 40 years ago. So, in the blood of the Limbuwani people, they feel: we are different people from Nepal because we have the specific history, unconquerable or undefeated history, and Limbu and the Limbuwani ... I feel, in my blood, this my blood is federal blood, because we have a long history of federalism and Limbuwan, our blood is undefeated blood – so, we are fighting for not "free Limbuwan", but "autonomous state Limbuwan", inside Nepal.<sup>109</sup>

The treaty Lingden mentions, made in 1774 between the Gorkha conqueror Prithvi Narayan Shah and a number of Limbu chiefs, is probably the most frequent historic reference evoked as a support for the historic existence and present day viability of Limbuwan as a separate, 'indigenous' territory. The treaty today is taken as signifying the opposition between the Limbus and the high-caste Hindu rulers of central Nepal, the bravery of the Limbus, and the relative autonomy of Limbuwan from the Gorkha empire it was made part of in the late-eighteenth century. The narrative of the treaty furthermore carries substantial academic authority, as it has been treated not only by Chemjong, but also by major academic figures such as the Nepali social scientist, Mahesh Chandra Regmi (1978) and the Indian Nepali historian Kumar Pradhan (1991). In Regmi's translation, the central part of the treaty text reads as follows – written from the perspective of the Gorkha emperors:

Although we have conquered your country by dint of our valor, we have afforded you and your kinsmen protection. We hereby pardon all of your crimes, and confirm all the customs and traditions, rights

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Kumar Lingden, Kathmandu, September 2011.

and privileges of your country. ... Enjoy the land from generation to generation, as long as it remains in existence. ... In case we confiscate your lands ... may our ancestral gods destroy our kingdom. (Regmi, 1978, p. 540)

In the academic/political discourse on Limbuwan the treaty is seen both as the institution of Limbuwan as an autonomous area – often likened in character to the autonomy of a future federal state – and as a confirmation of Limbuwan as an "ancestral land"<sup>110</sup> "being enjoyed since the time of forefathers" (K. Pradhan, 1991, p. 204). The treaty thus comes to signify both an ancient, indigenous rooting of the Limbus in Limbuwan and the (second) birth of Limbuwan as an autonomous area. As reflected in Kumar Lingden's argument quoted above, the treaty provides a turning point around which Nepal can be described as having a history of federalism and Limbuwan in turn can be described as an 'indigenous' and 'autonomous' territory. Hence, together with the discourse on *kipat* described below, the story of the treaty supports the argument that the federal state-like autonomy of Limbuwan is actually the historical norm – from which only the last 40-so years, following the abolishment of *kipat*, differ.

#### **'Indigenous' Rooting: *Kipat* and Limbu Connections to the Land**

The specific land tenure arrangement called *kipat* is one of the main references in academic publications on eastern Nepal and the Limbus. *Kipat* is also an important point in the contemporary academic politics of Limbuwan. As I argue in the following, the way in which the notion of *kipat* has been brought out and interpreted within the academic literature facilitates the contemporary making of Limbuwan as an 'indigenous' place.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Arjun Limbu, Kathmandu, September 2010.

*Kipat* is typically described as a ‘communal’ form of land tenure practiced until the land reforms in the late 1960’s.<sup>111</sup> While a number of ‘indigenous’ groups have, most likely, been practicing *kipat* (see e.g. Regmi, 1978) it is today most strongly associated with the Limbus (possibly somewhat due to Caplan’s book). The practice is seen as ‘communal’ in the sense that *kipat* land is regarded as inalienable from the local ‘indigenous’ community. Only members of this community can own *kipat* land although they can give the land in lease to other groups in exchange for loans. As opposed to other forms of land tenure, the tax paid on *kipat* to the central state is based on landholding households rather than the actual area of usable land (see e.g. Caplan, 1970, 1991, 2000; Forbes, 1996; Regmi, 1978). As a ‘head-tax’ rather than a ‘land-tax’, *kipat* thus exemplifies the limited reach central control over the territory in eastern Nepal until well into the twentieth century.

The book by Lionel Caplan, that I encountered in Mohan’s shop, appears as one of the main academic references on the local politics of *kipat* tenure in eastern Nepal (Caplan, 2000).<sup>112</sup> Before Caplan, Regmi also wrote extensively on *kipat* in relation to his research on land tenure systems in Nepal (Regmi, 1978, pp. chapters VII-XI) and a couple of (the few) later studies of eastern Nepal continue the focus on *kipat* (Caplan, 1991; Forbes, 1996; parts of Jones, 1976). Hence, the discourse on *kipat* bears a substantial academic authority in Nepal and a (critical) Nepali scholar in 1996 noted that, “of the many works published by foreign anthropologists on Nepal, Lionel Caplan’s (...) is

<sup>111</sup> According to Forbes, *kipat* was actually practiced as late as 1994 in some areas of eastern Nepal due to the slow progression of the cadastral surveys needed to implement the land reforms (see Forbes, 1996).

<sup>112</sup> Several of my informants, for instance, immediately connected Caplan’s study to the notion of *kipat* when it came up in our conversations.

one of the most widely read” (Dahal, 1996, p. 50). At the same time, *kipat* shows up repeatedly in Limbu claims to territory and federal autonomy. Between academic texts and territorial claims *kipat* goes beyond simply signifying a specific relationship of tenure and taxation between the rulers in central Nepal and the people living in the eastern periphery (see e.g. Forbes, 1996, p. 40). The notion of *kipat* also roots the Limbus deeply in the soil of Limbuwan signifying the Limbus’ ancient ‘indigenous’ relationship to the land as well as their political autonomy from the rest of Nepal up to the land reforms in the late 1960’s.<sup>113</sup>

In most of his book, Caplan maintains a traditional anthropological village focus and his descriptions of the relationship between *kipat* and ancestral land is thus restricted to concrete local kinship networks. Later appropriations of the study, though, seem to have broadened this focus and *kipat* has come to be related more broadly to the Limbus as an ‘indigenous’ group. This perspective is also evident in Caplan’s own later writing e.g. in an article from 1991 where he states that:

(...) the Limbus shared a conception of land as held by countless indigenous or tribal peoples around the world, for whom membership in the community generates an attitude to the land which is antecedent to the working of it (...). *Kipat* was thus more than a system of land tenure; it was the basis of Limbu identity as a people. (Caplan, 1991, pp. 312-313)

Here, Caplan connects *kipat* not only to Limbu identity, but to a supposedly global identity of indigenous peoples. Such global connections have recently been re-emphasised in relation to the global

<sup>113</sup> Forbes describes something similar with regards to *kipat* among the Yamphu Rai stating that, “as a symbol expressing the past glory of their ancestors, *kipat* was part of a narrative that links the Yamphu Rai to their past and to the lands on which that past has unfolded” (Forbes, 1996, p. 39).

environmental crisis, where the ‘indigenous’ link between Limbus and Limbuwan soil associated with *kipat* is presented as an “indigenous system of sustainable conservation” and preservation of natural resources (see e.g. Chettri, Shakya, & Sharma, 2008; Maden, Kongren, & Limbu, 2009; Mishra, 2003, p. 125).

With the connection between the indigeneity of the Limbus and *kipat* established, the gradual takeover of land by high-caste Hindu money-lenders described in detail by Caplan (and criticised by Dahal, 1996) and the final abolishment of *kipat* with the 1968 land reforms, becomes not only a loss of land, but a loss of culture. In the new postscript to a second edition of Caplan’s book,<sup>114</sup> he states that:

(...) the loss of *kipat* represented not simply a material loss, for *kipat* exceeded its own materiality. With its abolition, the Limbus were denied a part of their past and so, inevitably, of their sense of continuity in the present. *Kipat* provided a means of belonging, to a place and a distinctive community – the one was not separable from the other. (Caplan, 2000, pp. 211-212)

Often seen in connection with the Limbu-Gorkha treaty, the notion distinct community of *kipat*-holders (*kipatiya*) furthermore comes to signify a position of relative autonomy from the centre. The president of KYC, Arjun Limbu, e.g. formulated that “we consider the *kipat* as some remnant of the autonomy of what they have been practicing over there [i.e. in Limbuwan].”<sup>115</sup> Such a description of *kipat* is also echoed in discussions on local governance where it is described as an ‘indigenous’ practice of local governance and grass-root

democracy suitable for the development of Nepal (see e.g. Bhattachan, 2002). With this in mind, the abolishment of *kipat* signifies not also the loss of land, but with that a loss of both culture and historical autonomy by the hands of the central state personified by king Mahendra. *Kipat* thus brings out a position of opposition vis-à-vis high-caste Hindus. For both Caplan and some of my informants the practice of *kipat* indicated more of an inverse relationship of power between ‘indigenous’ Limbus and high caste Brahmins and Chettris than what is found in national politics. As such, the cultural uprooting emphasised by Caplan in relation to the abolishment of *kipat* comes to signify an extension of Hindu dominance even into the formerly ‘autonomous’ areas of Limbuwan.

The various elements in the discourse on *kipat* obviously resonate with both global and regional notions of indigeneity. In Caplan’s language, the notion of a unique connection to the land, a rooting of the Limbus in the landscape of Limbuwan is prominent. It brings out exactly the point about indigeneity that Liisa Malkki has reminded us about – that it operates through an imagination of solid, typically arboreal roots within a specific soil (Malkki, 1992). As notions of indigeneity have increasingly informed Nepali politics since 1990, this element in the discourse of *kipat* is important. It now fits perfectly not only with globalised notions of indigeneity, but with the Nepali state definition of who are indigenous (*janajāti*) as the communities “who have a separate collective cultural identity; (...) are traditionally located in particular geographic regions; [and] who do not have [an] influential role in the modern politics and state governance of Nepal” (cited in Onta, 2006, pp. 311-312). In one national definition of indigeneity, *kipat* has even slipped in as a possible defining criteria

<sup>114</sup> Published in 2000 by Himal Books. Himal Books is part of The Himal Association, “a Kathmandu Valley-based not-for-profit organisation established with the objective of informing the Nepali people of various issues, local, national and international, to help them become aware and responsible national and global citizens” ([www.himalassociation.org](http://www.himalassociation.org)). The book was reprinted again in 2002 and 2007.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Arjun Limbu, Kathmandu, September 2010.

(Onta, 2006, p. 311). The discourse on *kipat* thus contributes to the making of Limbuwan as an ‘indigenous’ place justifying Limbuwan as a future federal state.

### **Conclusion: Bordering Politics, Raising Awareness**

In summary, even in the contemporary conjuncture of governmental transition and political shifts, there seems to be a certain structuring of the way in which the politics of territorial reorganisation and place-making is taking place. As I show above, languages of ethnic and developmental differentiation are currently being refashioned and recombined in novel ways. And as I have argued with regards to Limbuwan, one of the important assemblages that are emerging out of these shifts in the politics of difference is the glocal indigenous place. In this assemblage, the academic treatment of ‘ethnic’ culture and history originating from local as well as international scholars attains a political life. Academic narratives are circulated in full or in bits and pieces, physically and electronically, with or without references. This circulation builds up a language of ethnic difference that enables claims for a Limbuwan state to resonate strikingly with globalised as well as nationally translated notions of indigeneity. The ability to strike this note repeatedly in a on-going academic politics obviously helps to empower the demand for a Limbuwan federal state in the present conjuncture of *Naya Nepal*.

The contemporary politics of difference is, in other words, enabling for claims to local autonomy through glocal ‘indigenous’ place-making in a sense that was not possible one or two decades ago. However, this politics is also bordered in, at least, two senses.

Firstly, the academic politics of indigeneity involve, as I argue above, a certain notion of ethnic fluency. In order to engage in

contemporary politics, one needs to be able to speak about history and culture in a certain way. Ethnic fluency, in other words, borderes politics. It is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate strictly how hard this border is today, but we can note certain resonances with the continued language of developmental difference and awareness. More or less across the board, all the ethnic representatives that I talked with during my fieldwork brought out notions of a loss of culture and lack of awareness among their ‘ethnic kin’. They, consequently saw it as one of the main tasks of their organisations to “raise awareness” about their indigenous history, culture, language etc. The knowledge that they sought to distribute was often, like the physical distribution of Caplan’s book illustrates, an academic re-construction of supposedly lost history and culture. This notion of raising awareness directly relates to the developmental differentiation of people and places as developed in and around Panchayat and contemporary schooling (Fujikura, 2001). Hence, while remote localities and the people living there are, in one sense, cast as authentic, they continue in another sense to be “unaware” – lacking the fluency of a specific, valued form of ethnic knowledge.

Secondly, the politics of Limbuwan that I have studied is strongly territorialised by the national border even though it relies on a history that both pre-dates and stretches across this border. Although the contemporary politics are focused on claims to more local autonomy, the longer history of Limbuwan describes a movement from state evasion towards state legibility. Today, claims are obviously directed towards the national centre. When the end of the CA tenure approached in May 2012, the FLSC and other Limbuwan organisations put their marches along the historic lines of Limbuwan on hold and began marching around the ring-road of Kathmandu. As this physical

movement indicates, gaining more say in local matters has become a question to discuss with Kathmandu and not a matter that builds connections across the border.

Many of the ‘ethnic’ representatives I talked to signaled sympathy towards the Gorkhaland movement. However, in spite of the common goal of local autonomy, none of them had made connections to organisations across the border. In the replies I got from them, it was obvious that although the border allows free movement of people, it does not allow the movement of “politics”. I was told of multiple familial and social relations, but not of “political”. Hence, the national border doubled as a border between what was considered “personal” or “social” and what was considered “political”. On the other side, in Darjeeling, I got similar signals. As one representative told me, they did not dare make too many connections with similar organisations across the border, as that would put them in danger of being associated with supposed Maoist activity in Nepal. In their quests for autonomy, the Limbuwan and Gorkhaland movement thus turn their backs to each other and their fronts towards the national centres reinforcing the national border that runs through the landscape.<sup>116</sup>

In closing, the contemporary politics of territorial reorganisation and glocal place-making appear both enabling and limiting for claims to local autonomy in Nepal. A report published by the Carter Center in 2010 based partly on survey data states that:

citizens who support federalism tend to associate it with decentralisation of power and hope that government will be brought closer to the people, allowing for greater access to the state, more

<sup>116</sup> As Srirupa Roy suggests for India, this illustrates a certain historic dynamic where the nation-states of South Asia are brought together around a shared orientation towards the developmentalist state (S. Roy, 2007).

accountable decision-making, improved service delivery, an end to discriminatory practices, and more equitable representation. (The Carter Center, 2010)

The report also describes “strong and consistent sentiments in favour” of “ethnic based federalism” among the Limbus in the Eastern Hills. In what light does the contemporary politics of difference place these aspirations? My analysis suggest that the academic politics of difference, on the one hand, facilitates strong claims to ethnic federalism based on glocal indigenous place-making. The question, however, is whether this politics will bring government “closer to the people” giving them “greater access to the state”. With the centralised politics of constitution-writing stalled, this obviously remains an open question. Nonetheless, the way in which fluency of a specific language of ethnic difference borders contemporary politics poses obvious risks. What might happen is simply a reorganisation of people into the familiar developmental categories of “aware” and “backward” citizens. And if the bordering of politics along lines of ethnic fluency continues, these categories of people will inevitably have very different amounts of say in a local politics that is still largely directed towards the national governmental centre.

## Chapter 7: 'Ruly Hills'

As described in chapter four, the governmental gaze of the British colonisers in northern India was fundamentally shaped by a distinction between the plains and the hills. Civilisation was equated with sedentary settlement and seen as the necessary basis for a uniform government. The hills, on the other hand, inhabited by less civilised, slash-and-burn farming tribals, were seen as spaces of exception - areas "not yet suited" for the same government as the plains. As the government of the subcontinent was handed over to the new national elite, these notions of exceptionalism continued to characterise the government of the hills in north eastern India. The internal governmental border of the 'Inner Line' separating the settled plains areas from the savage hills under British rule continued to shape the governmental gaze of independent India (Baruah, 2005, p. 37; Maaker & Joshi, 2007, pp. 381-382). Even today, a notion of the 'unruly hills' in need of special governmental measures dominates the political discourse (Karlsson, 2011). The north-eastern hills are typically represented in a discourse of "nameless 'insurgencies'" and counter-insurgencies (Baruah, 2005, p. vii). And while sympathies are obviously split between the 'rebels' and police, the common language of engagement is usually one of exception and disorder.

Within this political landscape, where the distinction between hills and plains also divides governmental intervention, the Darjeeling area is situated in an ambivalent position. Although periodically referred to in the language of unruliness, this area is predominately represented through references to a more distant past, a selective memory of the colonial hill station. In this representation, the hills are marked more in terms of harmony than unruliness. Jungled hills full of

armed insurgents and home-made bombs vie for the image of the tea garden's neat rows of lush green bushes and the puffing sound of the steam-driven old Toy Train making its way towards Darjeeling town. In these 'ruly' hills, pre-independence past and present commercial endeavours blend so seamlessly that national rupture of 1947 and the in-between interruptions of the Gorkhaland insurgency apparently disappear from view. Here, we are neither in the supposedly uniform national space of village India nor in the 'unruly' hills of the nearby areas. But, where are we then?

In this chapter I take up exactly this question: Where is Darjeeling? Obviously, "where" is not to be understood, here, in the established sense eliciting answers such as "in northern West Bengal, India" or "at X latitude and Y longitude" etc. Rather, I seek to examine the spatial practices and representations that have historically positioned the Darjeeling area in relation to the governmental gaze of the colonial and post-colonial state. More specifically, I am interested in exploring the position of the Darjeeling area in relation to the multiple, divergent meanings that have been attached to hills and plains in the intersection between colonial and post-colonial government. As distinctions of place and landscape have obviously informed the government of colonial and national territory, asking the simple spatial question "where" brings out underlying dynamics that shape the area's position in the political landscape (see Ludden, 2005b).

### Village India

As introduced in chapter four, the process of sedentary settlement across the subcontinent fed into the production of a distinct normative landscape across late colonial and post-colonial India – a framework of belonging, identity, and difference that posed a distinct landscape and a



distinct form of settlement in this landscape as the norm. Across 'territorial colonialism' and post-colonial developmentalism, this normative landscape was largely shaped in the image of the settled agrarian village of the plains and thus excluded the 'wild' hills of the north east as well as the more 'ruly' hills of Darjeeling. (cf. Inden, 2000, pp. 131-157; Ludden, 1993).

In the nationalist discourse of Nehru, Gandhi and Ambedkar, exactly the image of the rural, sedentary village of the plains emerges as a sort of microcosm representing "real" India (Gandhi, 2010; Jodhka, 2002; Nehru, 1998). While, as Guha suggests, this image probably co-developed with the sedentarisation taking place only during late colonial rule, in the national discourse the generic village becomes an image of how the Indian peasant is "wedded to the soil from immemorial generations" (Nehru, 1998, p. 53). The generic village, thus, enables Nehru to speak of *Bharat Mata* (mother India) in the language of an ancient, agricultural connection to the soil, to speak of the present in the language of rural backwardness, and to speak of the future in terms of economic development (Khilnani, 1997; Nehru, 1998; S. Roy, 2007) – images repeatedly recycled in school textbooks and official discourse at least till the late 1980's (Advani, 1996, 2009; Inden, 2000; Muley & Sharma, 1987; S. Roy, 2007).

In Indian national discourse, the idyllic but backward village enabled a representation of the space of the nation as relatively homogenous. As Srirupa Roy suggests in her study of Nehruvian India:

The homogenous configuration of the nation-state as a space peopled by identical, substitutable individuals would be enabled in the Indian context by the discourse of needs rather than the discourse of rights or of cultural commonalities (S. Roy, 2007, p. 114).

The discourse of economic development, facilitated by a 'state-representing-the-nation' (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 168), thus enabled the representation of Indian national space through the uniform image of the backward village (Ludden, 1992; S. Roy, 2007).<sup>117</sup> In turn, initiatives such as the massive state-led Community Development Programme initiated in 1952, honed the governmental vision of the state to see the agricultural, rural village as the generic object of intervention.<sup>118</sup> Hence, the generic village enabled a centralised state legibility of the landscape in much the same way as the *normalbaum* enabled the centralised legibility of German scientific forestry in James Scott's account (1998, pp. 11-22). As a later civics textbook tells the story (see also illustration below):

The aim of the Community Development Programme is to develop the villages which depends on three factors: (i) increase in the production of the crop and other commodities produced in the area; (ii) total development of the rural people; and (iii) cooperation of the villagers in rural development. (Muley & Sharma, 1987, p. 13)

Consequently, Nehruvian developmentalism crucially supported the representation of Indian national space as a relatively homogenous landscape of backward, rural, sedentary villages producing a distinct landscape of identification for the new nation.

<sup>117</sup> Within this vision, even issues of social differentiation, such as the question of untouchability, are translated into the language of development because, as the textbooks states, "as long as these people are considered inferior, we cannot get their full cooperation in the programmes for the progress of our country" (Muley & Sharma, 1987, p. 11).

<sup>118</sup> The village was, in fact, such an important figure of spatial imagination in early post-colonial India that the constituent assembly even discussed whether the village should be primary unit of the Indian polity instead of the individual (Jodhka, 2002, p. 3344).

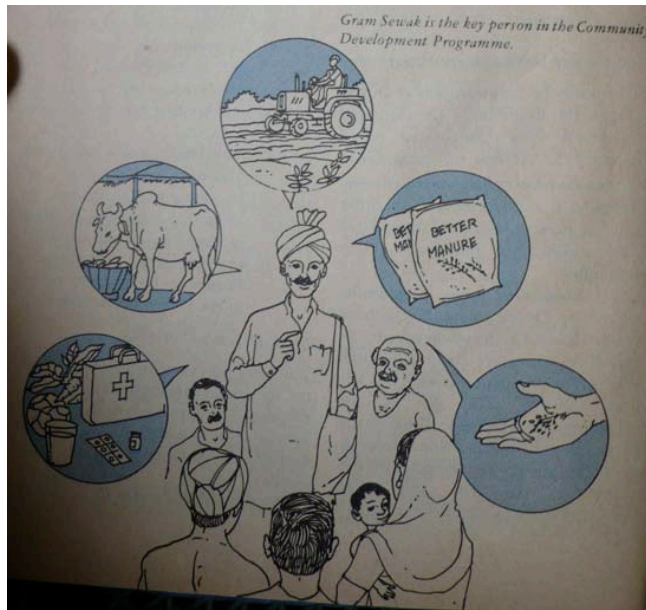


Illustration 9: Telling the villagers about development (Muley & Sharma, 1987, p. 14)

Where does this image leave the forests and hills in relation to the normative, national landscape of the agrarian village of the plains? As Guha suggests, the sweep of sedentary settlement moulded large areas of the subcontinent in the image of the agrarian village (see also Bhattacharya, 2012). The “north-eastern and north-western boundaries of the empire” were, however, an exception – the last “no-go areas” of the twentieth century (S. Guha, 1999, pp. 4, 200). Here, the division between hills and plains was in fact legally solidified. In 1873 an ‘Inner Line’ was introduced “drawn along the foothills”, a line that distinguished the settled plains areas that were to be governed normally from the “backward” and “frontier” tracts of the hills in need of a

different sort of management (Baruah, 1999, pp. 28-29). The notion of the timeless tribal and the consequent paternalist approach of the colonial state left these areas in a position of isolation that, according to Guha, was in fact unprecedented (S. Guha, 1999, p. 201; Sonntag, 1999).

The legislative institutionalisation of the exceptionalism attached to the north-eastern hills of the subcontinent was maintained across colonial and post-colonial government. In the 1874 Scheduled Districts Act, and the 1919 and 1935 Government of India Acts, these areas were designated as ‘scheduled districts’, ‘backward tracts’, and ‘excluded’ or ‘partially excluded’ areas. The significance of these designations was that the common rules and regulations of the raj did not automatically apply. What Gait referred to as government “in a simpler and more personal manner” essentially meant that the areas were placed under the direct administration of the British governor of the province in which they were situated. Furthermore, when a limited degree of public representation was introduced into the legislative councils of the raj from 1909 onwards, these areas were excluded from this representation (Baruah, 1999, p. 37). From 1935 and well into the governmental history of independent India, the issue of these areas was taken up under what became known as ‘the tribal question’. Splitting public opinion between paternal protectionism and developmental upliftment, these discussions re-emphasised the exceptional character of the hills leading to the constitution of independent India’s designation of them as ‘scheduled’ and ‘tribal’ areas under the fifth and sixth schedule. By law, these areas were to be managed differently from the rest of the country.

As I argue in the following, the colonial moulding of the Indian landscape in terms of large scale practices of encouraged sedentary settlement, the accompanying normative representation of the landscape in the image of the agrarian village, and the contrasting representation of the north-eastern hills in terms of timeless tribal isolation circumscribe Darjeeling's position in the post-colonial political landscape. As independence arrived, the position of Darjeeling in this landscape was conditioned by a range of negotiations taking place in relation to the production of a bordered and organised national territory. However, these negotiations (of the partition of the subcontinent and the following reorganisation of states within an Indian union) largely took place outside Darjeeling and outside the influence of people living there, in the centres of Calcutta and Delhi. Here, in a period of substantial uncertainty, self-interested political negotiations defaulted on existing lines of territorial distinction. As a result, Darjeeling's territorial future was wedded to West Bengal, while the area's position in the political landscape, and the meaning attached to it as a place, continued to be ambiguous: it was neither part of 'village India' nor the 'unruly' hills of the north-east.

#### **Colonialism and National Territorialisation of the Political Landscape**

The transition from British to Indian rule obviously involved a range of territorial negotiations, most importantly the partition of the subcontinent and the following reorganisation of states within the Indian union. In a sense, this period could be seen as one of extraordinary openness to territorial restructuring. It was, indeed, a period in which a multitude of different suggestions for the Darjeeling area were brought up. However, existing territorial borders and political arrangements under British rule in fact, largely determined the

role of the Darjeeling area in these complex political negotiations. In the end, Darjeeling ended up as the northern-most territorial outcrop of the West Bengal state – territorially detached from the rest of the state between 1947 and 1956.

In Bengal, the British partition plan was based on a (limited) Indian participation through the Bengal legislative assembly. Out of the 250 members of this assembly, only two were elected from Darjeeling (Dasgupta, 1999, p. 61) while the two major parties, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League had 86 and 113 members respectively.<sup>119</sup> In a situation surrounded by a great uncertainty as to where the borderline would eventually be drawn, the ensuing negotiations were narrowly focused on the claims of core constituency areas for the main political players (Chatterji, 1999, 2007). In these discussions, the role of Darjeeling was that of "a glittering prize" rather than an essential part of the negotiations. The area, after all, produced "practically all of India's finest teas" and was therefore "potentially a significant source of revenue for the new state" (Chatterji, 2007, p. 48). Consequently, Darjeeling was claimed by six out of seven 'non-Muslim' proposals as well as by the Muslim League who, apparently, even had the Pakistani flag raised over Darjeeling town hall from 14-18 August 1947 (see Chatterji, 1999, pp. 197-200; 2007, p. 51; Schendel, 2005, p. 52n27).

Albeit largely isolated from the negotiation process, the territorial position of the Darjeeling area was, nonetheless, affected by partition. As the borderline was drawn, the ensuing arrangement not only split East Pakistan from West Bengal. The former colonial state of Bengal -

<sup>119</sup> One of the Darjeeling MLAs, Dambar Singh Gurung of the All India Gorkha League, went on to become the only 'Gorkha' in the Constituent Assembly.

along with the Sylhet area of colonial Assam<sup>120</sup> - was in fact divided into four major pieces<sup>121</sup> (Schendel, 2005, pp. 43-44): *East Bengal* (that joined Pakistan in 1947), *West Bengal* (that joined India in 1947), *Tripura* (a princely state that joined India in 1949), and *North Bengal* (comprising the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri that joined India in 1947 and the princely state of Cooch Behar that joined India in 1950). Out of these, North Bengal was administratively part of West Bengal, but territorially cut off from the rest of the state until the States Reorganisation Act in 1956. Centred on existing lines of territorial division and systems of political representation, the partition negotiations placed Darjeeling and the other northern areas in a territorially separate, passive and "quasi-colonial" relationship with the political core around Calcutta (Chatterji, 2007, pp. 51-52).

Although the 'core-constituency' focus of the Bengal partition negotiations and the general national emphasis on Hindu-Muslim lines of division largely overshadows other discussions, this territorial arrangement for Darjeeling wasn't the only option out there at the time. As mentioned above, the Muslim league e.g. suggested that Darjeeling should be a part of East Pakistan and Assamese politicians also encouraged "anti-Bengali movements in north Bengal" in the context of partition (Chatterji, 2007, p. 48n68). In Darjeeling, various alliances between British planters and Nepali elites had, already from 1907 onwards, led to a series of proposals for separation from Bengal (see e.g. Dasgupta, 1999; T. B. Subba, 1992). As partition drew closer, association with Assam was seen as a favourable option in these circles. In 1930, the newly formed Hillmens Association suggested

<sup>120</sup> See (Ludden, 2003a) for an earlier history of the Sylhet border.

<sup>121</sup> And no less than 197 smaller enclaves – 74 Pakistani ones located within Indian territory, and 123 Indian ones located in Pakistani territory (Schendel, 2005, p. 43).

separation from Bengal, backed by Assamese politicians and favoured by the tea planters "who saw advantages in having their estates in the less volatile province of Assam, safe from the communist menace" of West Bengal (Chatterji, 2007, p. 48n68). Among the intellectual middle class, Parasmani Pradhan and others spoke against this option, focusing instead on the more introspective agenda of 'jati improvement' including the promotion of Nepali language and some measures of regional autonomy within West Bengal (Dasgupta, 1999, p. 59; Onta, 1996b).

After partition, the list of propositions only grew longer. In 1949, the All India Gorkha League proposed the formation of a separate provincial legislature (i.e. a new state within the Indian union to be) called 'Uttarakhand'.<sup>122</sup> The area of this legislature was left open to include anywhere between just the existing Darjeeling district and all of Darjeeling, Sikkim, Jalpaiguri, Dooars, and Coochbehar (T. B. Subba, 1992, pp. 86-89). Later, in 1952, the League also proposed setting up Darjeeling as a Union Territory (M. P. Lama, 1996, p. 10). In a more radical vein, two local leaders of the (undivided) Communist Party of India (CPI), even suggested the formation of an independent state of 'Gorkhasthan' comprising all of Nepal, Darjeeling and the southern parts of Sikkim. This long range of options illustrates that the position of Darjeeling within the new political landscape of the emerging national territory was rather 'unsettled'. Although important territorial decisions were made in relation to Darjeeling during partition, these did not involve any new, national ascription of meaning to Darjeeling as a place in this landscape.

<sup>122</sup> Not to be confused with the 27th Indian state formed as 'Uttaranchal' in 2000 and renamed 'Uttarakhand' in 2007.

After partition, the question of reorganising the territory of independent India quickly re-surfaced. Between 1953 and 1956 a complex negotiation process took place in the purview of the States Reorganisation Commission (Franda, 1968, pp. 8-61). During these negotiations a broad range of different options for the reorganisation of West Bengal were taken up. However, although petitions continued to come in from North Bengal and Darjeeling, the fate of this area is hardly mentioned in relation to these negotiations. Judging from the language of the report and Marcus Franda's detailed description of the negotiation process (Franda, 1968; States Reorganisation Commission, 1955) the main reason seems to be that the existing states – inherited from the British colonial administrations – were taken as the ultimate reference point framing the discussions. In the Bengal area, the reorganisation wasn't seen as a fundamental restructuring, but rather as an adjustment of the borders between existing states. Thus in the discussions as well as the final report, the perspectives of the existing states were foregrounded and personified to the extent that the report even refers to the *feelings* of West Bengal (States Reorganisation Commission, 1955, p. 174).

Overall, the issue of reorganisation was cast as a question of negotiating territorial demands between the existing states of Bihar and West Bengal so as to allow 'mainland' West Bengal access to and control over the northern districts that were included in the state after partition.<sup>123</sup> Within this framework, the recent "dismemberment" of (West) Bengal during partition was seen as an important background event and the claims to Darjeeling from both Assam and Bihar were

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<sup>123</sup> This focus even led to a period in the discussion where a full merger of the two states was considered as a solution (Franda, 1968, pp. 36-51).

quickly dismissed (Dasgupta, 1999, p. 61; see map in Franda, 1968, p. 23; States Reorganisation Commission, 1955, pp. 171, 192). Darjeeling and north Bengal were by now seen as a part of West Bengal, and the main problem related to the area as one of making the state "a compact and integrated unit" (States Reorganisation Commission, 1955, p. 172). This problem was, furthermore, approached from the spatial perspective of Calcutta: Since "the northern districts of the Presidency division have become *less accessible from Calcutta*" after partition, the solution should enable "West Bengal (...) to control road traffic with Darjeeling and other places in the North" (States Reorganisation Commission, 1955, pp. 172, 175 – my emphasis).

With the dry statement that, "the continued isolation of the northern districts from the rest of West Bengal will tend to foster and accentuate separatist trends in these districts" (States Reorganisation Commission, 1955, p. 175) the States Reorganisation Commission repeated the partition negotiations' relegation of the area to the periphery of territorial decision-making. As the discussion across the two territorial reorganisations illustrate, the attachment of meaning to Darjeeling and its surroundings as places was still unsettled. However, as the following section argues, the territorialisation of the political landscape into the separate states of West Bengal and Assam had important ramifications for the position of the Darjeeling area in relation to the ascription of 'tribalness' and the ensuing possibilities for various degrees of local autonomy.

### **Darjeeling on the edge of the 'Tribal Question'**

In close relation to the discussions of territorial reorganisation, the question of a 'tribal' identity calling for special governmental arrangements for specific people and places was part of the constituent

assembly debates. The question of how best to handle 'tribal' population and areas within the emerging national territory was taken up and discussed in various committees and ultimately in the constituent assembly. Although thoroughly discussed, evidence for the Darjeeling area suggests that colonial territorial divisions and categorisations of ethnic difference again played a determining role. As the British administration had consistently regarded Darjeeling as separate from the wild hills of Assam, the question of Darjeeling 'tribalness' ended up being judged in a different forum and following different criteria than that of the neighbouring areas to the east. Due to this, the special territorial arrangements implemented in Assam were not considered for Darjeeling. Here, like in the rest of the country, non-territorial reservations and other privileges were seen as the solution. Hence, also in relation to the 'tribal question', Darjeeling ended up occupying a position somewhere in-between the major categories of national space – the agrarian village of the plains and the tribal settlements of the hills.

When the Government of India Act introduced the designation of areas as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' it raised "a storm in nationalist circles" (Ramachandra Guha, 1996, p. 2375). The initiative was seen as yet another way to divide and rule the Indian people. Between the passing of the Act in 1935 and the promulgation of the Indian constitution in 1950, this initial outrage introduced what was to be called the 'Tribal Question'<sup>124</sup> into discussions of the spatial and territorial organisation of colonial and independent India. Involving a

<sup>124</sup> Sometimes more negatively referred to as the 'Tribal Problem'.

mixture of politicians, social workers and academics<sup>125</sup> the discussions about how best to handle the tribal population quickly crystallised into two camps. The 'isolationists' or 'protectionists', with the British anthropologist Verrier Elwin in the forefront, argued in favour of setting aside certain areas for the 'tribal' population in which they could practice their supposedly harmonious, wholesome, social life as they would 'naturally' do without interference from the state. The 'assimilationists' or 'interventionists' led by the congress leader A. V. Thakkar and anthropologist G. S. Ghurye, on the other hand, posed the 'tribals' as a 'backward' part of the population in need of 'upliftment' (Ramachandra Guha, 1996; R. Guha, 1999).

After independence, the 'tribal question' was taken up in the context of two subcommittees under the Constituent Assembly. The "North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee" presided over by Gopinath Bordoloi was to provide recommendations for the Assam area while the "Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas (other than Assam) Sub-Committee" led by A. V. Thakkar was to recommend actions for areas outside of Assam designated as 'excluded' or 'partially excluded' under the Government of India Act. Hence, the territorial delineations of British colonial legislation provided the main frame for bringing discussions of the tribal question into the Constituent Assembly. The division of the tribal question into two sub-committees reflected the colonial designation of the north eastern areas (i.e. colonial Assam) as a fundamentally different place from the rest of India.

<sup>125</sup> Such as A. V. Thakkar (congress politician and social worker), Verrier Elwin (British Anthropologist 'gone native'), G. S. Ghurye (prominent Indian social anthropologist), see (Ramachandra Guha, 1996; R. Guha, 1999).

Obviously, the Bordoloi and the Thakkar committees applied very different approaches to the tribal question. Thakkar was thoroughly in the 'assimilationist' camp speaking against the territorial isolation of 'tribal' communities which he saw as striking "at the root of national solidarity" (Ramachandra Guha, 1996, p. 2380) and regarding the ultimate goal of the regulations to be the 'upliftment' and incorporation of the 'tribals' into the national mainstream. Bordoloi, on the other hand, was – along with Nehru himself – much more in line with Elwin (Ramachandra Guha, 1996; R. Guha, 1999). With this in mind, it seems apparent that the geographical delineation of the committees and the choice of their chairmen was informed by a continued conception of the north-eastern hills as fundamentally different from the rest of the country – as was the results of the committees' deliberations. As a joint report of the two committees expressed it:

(...) we are of the view that although certain features are common to all these areas, yet the circumstances of the Assam Hill Districts are so different that radically different proposals have to be made for the areas of this Province.<sup>126</sup>

They, in other words, clearly distinguished between measures appropriate for the Assamese hills and measures appropriate for the other 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas where "the degree of assimilation is on the whole greater".<sup>127</sup>

For the Assamese hills, the report recommended the setup of "special local councils" to provide a measure of local autonomy to the

<sup>126</sup> Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol 7, Part 1i. Available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p1i.htm> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>127</sup> Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol 7, Part 1i. Available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p1i.htm> (accessed August 2012).

tribal areas along with their continued exclusion from the normal acts and laws of the nation if deemed inappropriate. These recommendations were incorporated into the sixth schedule of the constitution in 1950. For the other provinces that had areas designated as 'excluded' or 'partially excluded' under the 1935 Government of India Act a range of non-territorial measures were instead suggested such as:

proportionate representation for the tribals as a whole in the Legislature [as well as] the scheduling of certain areas as in need of special attention and in which the protection of land and the social organisation of the tribals is an indispensable need.<sup>128</sup>

In contrast to the proposition for the Assamese hills, this involved treating "all persons of tribal origin as a single minority". While the Assam area was thus seen as in need of certain measures of local territorial autonomy, the tribal population of the other provinces were mainly treated through non-territorial measures, expressed in the fifth schedule of the 1950 constitution.

Evaluations of the 'tribalness' of the former 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas obviously relied on the internal border of a territorial distinction between Assam and the rest of the country. Hence, the territorial settlement of Darjeeling as a part of West Bengal rather than Assam (as several groups had suggested) had important consequences for Darjeeling's position as a 'tribal area'. External territorial decision and the representation of Darjeeling as a place interacted. The consequence for Darjeeling was that its position in

<sup>128</sup> Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol 7, Part 1i. Available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p1i.htm> (accessed August 2012).

relation to the 'tribal question' was taken up under the Thakkar committee rather than the Bordoloi committee.

The Thakkar committee report highlights two basic features of the committee's work with the Darjeeling area. Firstly, the discussion of the area fundamentally relies on designations made under British colonial rule. The very reason for taking up Darjeeling district in the committee is a direct reference to its designation as a 'partially excluded' area under the 1935 Government of India Act. The report notes that:

The partial exclusion of Darjeeling was recommended by the [British] Govt. of Bengal not because it was considered a backward area but because it was felt that safeguards were necessary in the interests of the hill people. The fact that Darjeeling was the summer capital of the Government of Bengal and the existence of European tea-planters may have played some little part.<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, while report recognises the presence of "141,301 tribes out of a total population of 376,369 in 1941," it goes on to point out that the prominent "Gurkha" or "Nepalese" community is "not regarded as a backward tribe and the thirteenth schedule to the [1936] Govt. of India (Legislative Assemblies) Order does not include Gurkha." The evaluation of both territory and population in the area thus explicitly relies on colonial governmental designations.

Furthermore, while the joint report of the two committees considered the Assam area in need of special treatment due to its excluded and anthropologically specific character, the Thakkar commission report instead evaluated the Darjeeling area and its

<sup>129</sup> Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. 7, Thursday 4 November 1948, available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p1g.htm> (accessed May 2012).

population mainly in terms of 'backwardness'. While it is noted that the "Gurkha" feel "neglected," the main thrust of the evaluation refers to the (lack of) backwardness of the area. Translated into the manageable figures of literacy, the report notes that "even among the tribals (mostly tea garden coolies) there was 16,450 literates out of a total population of 141,301 and 2,571 of these were women." – supposedly good figures for the time. Subsequently, the report goes on to conclude that "undoubtedly the land [of] the hill tribes needs to be protected from the maw of money lenders but there is little case otherwise for continuing partial exclusion or special administration."<sup>130</sup>

As a consequence of this evaluation, the Darjeeling area was not inscribed as a 'scheduled area' in the fifth schedule of the new constitution. Albeit obviously not part of 'village India', territorial and 'tribal' negotiations reiterated Darjeeling's separation from the 'unruly' hills of the tribal north-east.<sup>131</sup> In this ambiguous position, the very different representation of Darjeeling as the 'ruly' hills of a colonial hill station, of tea gardens, and of tourism largely prevailed – at least until the Gorkhaland movement in the mid-1980s forced Darjeeling

<sup>130</sup> Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. 7, Thursday 4 November 1948, available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p1g.htm> (accessed May 2012).

<sup>131</sup> Seen as the original inhabitants of the area, the Lepcha and Bhutia were individually recognised as scheduled tribes (STs) under the fifth schedule in 1950. Among the 'Nepali' groups, this sort of non-territorial recognition was, however, not extended until 2003 when the Limbus and the Tamang were accepted into the schedule (see [http://www.anagrasarkalyan.gov.in/pdf/constitution\\_scheduled\\_tribes\\_order\\_1950.pdf](http://www.anagrasarkalyan.gov.in/pdf/constitution_scheduled_tribes_order_1950.pdf) (accessed August 2012)). Many other groups still have pending applications for such a status and the benefits that follow in terms of educational and occupational reservations (Middleton, 2010).



"into the post-Independence national consciousness of India" (N. Lama, 2006).<sup>132</sup>

### Taking the Heritage Train through a Crack in National History

*At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.(...) India discovers herself again. -*

Jawaharlal Nehru, 14 August 1947.

In this section, I argue that Darjeeling's ambivalent position within Indian national delineations of space is reflected in the way in which the area evades the foundational watershed in Indian national history – August 14, 1947.

British Colonialism, Nehruvian Post-colonial rule and that date in 1947 that ostensibly separates the two are obvious, towering landmarks in Indian national discourse. No matter whether the ancient Indian civilisation is fashioned in the universalistic image of Nehru's *Bharat Mata* (Goswami, 2004; Nehru, 1998, pp. 52-54; S. Roy, 2007) or in the saffron shades of Hindu nationalism, this civilisation was supposedly reawakened from a long colonial slumber "at the stroke of the midnight hour" on 14 August 1947 to be "rediscovered" by every Indian citizen and school child since then (see e.g. Government of India, 1986, p. 6). Darjeeling, however, provides the space for a very different history. In the dominant history of Darjeeling the great national disjuncture of 1947 is all but forgotten, overshadowed by the continuities of British heritage.<sup>133</sup> As a consequence, Darjeeling might be placed in the hills,

<sup>132</sup> In the meantime, a range of Nepali activists in Darjeeling focused, instead, on the acceptance of Nepali as an official language of India – another non-territorial form of recognition – achieved in 1992.

<sup>133</sup> Following Laurajane Smith, I see heritage as "a cultural tool that nations, societies, communities and individuals use to express, facilitate and construct a sense of identity, self and belonging in which the 'power of place' is invoked in its

but the ordered ones: those of the neat colonial tea gardens, the cute world heritage Toy Train, and the historic Queen of Hills Stations. As a place, the historical meaning typically attached to Darjeeling, in other words, differs widely from that of national, mainland India as well as from the 'unruly hills'.

For the visitor arriving from the plains of Siliguri, the spatial experience of entering the Darjeeling area underlines the complex meaning attached to the 'ruly' hills of Darjeeling. The main road into the Darjeeling hills follows the railroad tracks of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) along much of its length. For both train and car passengers, the railway provides a physical manifestation of the space one is entering. In *Producing India*, Goswami makes a strong argument that the railways established under the British 'territorial colonialism' were quickly appropriated as symbols of national development and integration after 1947. From Nehru onwards, "railways are a chief leitmotif in the on-going practices and rituals of Indian nationhood" (Goswami, 2004, p. 130) – as the slogan of the Indian Railway company states: "Indian Railways – Lifeline to the Nation"<sup>134</sup>. Similarly, in the school textbooks of the late 1980s a train bursts ahead along with other items of "our national property" obviously bound for a modern, developed future (Muley & Sharma, 1987, p. 44). Although constructed during the high tide of territorial colonialism<sup>135</sup>, the DHR has not undergone such translation into a symbol of the Indian nation.

representational sense to give physical reality to these expressions and experiences" (Smith, 2006, p. 75).

<sup>134</sup> See the Ministry of Railways homepage - <http://www.indianrailways.gov.in/> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>135</sup> Financially supported by the Government of Bengal and apparently motivated by economic considerations (price differences for essential commodities and the need to transport tea out of

Made a UNESCO world heritage site in 1999, the DHR instead suggests connections to a globalised history of heritage where nationalist distinctions between colonial and post-colonial rule fade from view. As the official UNESCO introduction states, "the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway is intimately linked with the development of Darjeeling as the queen of hill stations and one of the main tea-growing areas in India, in the early nineteenth century."<sup>136</sup> As such, the colonial legacy of the 'Toy Train' merges with the other T's repeatedly listed across tourist brochures and official state descriptions of the area. As the official government website for Darjeeling states on its front page: "It is certainly that Darjeeling in the post modern era [sic] comprises of six T's -Tea, Teak, Tourism, Toy Train, Tiger Hill and Trekkers' paradise"<sup>137</sup>. The 'Toy Train' thus provides a physical manifestation of the representation of Darjeeling as a heritage site, a colonial hill state, a tourist destination and a geographical reference point for tea as a globally branded commodity.

In this commodified form, we might re-raise the question: where is Darjeeling? Or, to paraphrase a question Jayeeta Sharma asks herself in her recent book on the colonial history of Assam: "is Darjeeling merely a label, like Demerara or Madeira, an adjunct to the term 'tea', for the world at large?" (see also Baruah, 1999, pp. xviii-xix; J. Sharma, 2011, p. 19). In other words, what becomes of Darjeeling as a

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Darjeeling for export from the port in Calcutta) the Eastern Bengal Railways agent Franklin Prestage initiated constructions in 1879. Two years later, in 1981 the new Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) Company opened a small 2-foot gauge railroad connecting the plains station of Siliguri with Darjeeling hills. Connecting the Darjeeling hills to Calcutta and mainland India, the DHR by 1914/15 carried 250,000 passengers and transported 60,000 tons of freight including 5,354 tons of tea. [http://dhr.indianrailways.gov.in/view\\_section.jsp?lang=0&id=0.1.261](http://dhr.indianrailways.gov.in/view_section.jsp?lang=0&id=0.1.261) (accessed August 2012) see also <http://www.dhrs.org/page16.html>

<sup>136</sup> See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/944> (accessed August 2012). See also the BBC documentary "The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway".

<sup>137</sup> See <http://darjeeling.gov.in/> (accessed August 2012).

place when its commodified avatars – tea, heritage, tourism – take over the global imagination of the area? I suggest that Darjeeling, in this form, attains some of the characteristics of a 'non-place', a place that is everywhere and nowhere (Augé, 2008). Although Darjeeling obviously occupies a specific physical position on the globe, its production as an 'anthropological place' – through local ascription of meaning – inevitably takes place in a context characterised by representations of Darjeeling as a commodified non-place. Branded tea, BBC documentaries about the world heritage Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, and tourism brochures create a "false familiarity" with Darjeeling, a globalised sense of Darjeeling as a place mediated by the image of the heritage hill station and harmonious tea gardens (cf. Augé, 2008, pp. 26, 96).

In the following, I suggest that the imagination of Darjeeling through the lens of the colonial hills station and geographically certified tea production produces an image of the area as 'ruly' and harmonious – and as untouched by historical ruptures. Although the violence of the Gorkhaland movement cannot be fully concealed it is presented as an anomaly. While the other hills of the north-east are framed in terms of *perpetual* unruliness, the unruliness of Darjeeling is merely *periodic* – brief disruptions before the area 'returns to peace'.

#### Exploration and Nostalgia: Colonial Imagination of the Hill Station

The hills stations of the British Raj fulfilled a multitude of functions and, as places, they were imbued with a complex set of meanings (see e.g. Kennedy, 1996, p. 4). As many of the hill stations, Darjeeling was established as a sanatorium, a place of refuge from the heat of the plains for the British troops and administrators. However, like many other hills stations, Darjeeling quickly also became a place for

scientific exploration, military recruitment, imperial government, commercial ventures and homely leisure. As such Darjeeling shaped and was in turn shaped by the specific colonial gaze of the 'hill station'. As a 1857 'guide' to Darjeeling states "the natural scenery of the Darjeeling territory is full of interest to the admirer of nature and the man of science".<sup>138</sup> In a mixture of homely nostalgia, exotic romance and picturesque aesthetic with cutting-edge scientific inquiry, colonial administration and imperial commerce, the landscape of the Darjeeling hills was set aside both from the confusion of the hot and crowded plains as well as from the 'unruly' hills of the north-east.

From the explorations of the early eighteenth century onwards, the Himalayan foothills were seen as virtual botanical and ethnographic museums, and the Himalayan hill stations quickly became important hubs for scientific knowledge production on nature and people (Arnold, 2006). Darjeeling, for longer or shorter periods, housed a range of the foremost academics of the time. The first superintendent of the Darjeeling sanatorium, Dr. Archibald Campbell, was keenly interested in geography, ethnography and botany and initiated the first experiments with tea cultivation in the area. Similarly, from 1845-1858, the ornithologist and ethnologist Brian Houghton Hodgson stayed in Darjeeling to continue his explorations of the Himalayan region after his former position as the British Resident in Kathmandu. Campbell and Hodgson were furthermore friends of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, a famous British botanist and explorer of the time who stayed with them during his mid-century expeditions to Darjeeling and the surroundings. As a close friend of Charles Darwin, Hooker connected

<sup>138</sup> "The Darjeeling Guide" was originally published in the quarterly *Calcutta Review*, Vol. LV, 1857, pp. 196-225. It is reprinted as an appendix to (O'Malley, [2001] 1907, pp. 283-320).

their explorations of the Himalayan region with the foremost theories of environment and race available at the time (Arnold, 2006, pp. 185-224). The scientific investigations of the Darjeeling hills not only fed into the knowledge production of the local colonial administration, they were in the forefront of contemporary global knowledge production.

As much as Darjeeling hill station was a place for making sense of the surrounding landscape and its people, it was at the same time a place for organising and governing this landscape. As a long range of studies have argued, colonial knowledge production was intimately intertwined with colonial government – shaping the governmental gaze (Breckenridge & Veer, 1993; Cohn, 1987a, 1996; Dirks, 2001). In the hill stations, the British perspective on the Indian landscape was mediated by a prevalent 'picturesque' aesthetic (Kennedy, 1996, p. 40). Substantially informed by comparison to the homely landscapes of the British hills, the British residents of the hill stations represented the landscape – graphically and discursively – in a nostalgic and romantic light.<sup>139</sup> A range of physical interventions, from the felling of forest to the construction of European style cottages, further moulded the landscape to fit this image (Kennedy, 1996; Kenny, 1995). In Darjeeling, large amounts of forest were cut down giving way to 'tea gardens' (Hunter, 1876, p. 19; Kennedy, 1996, p. 53). The 10,000 acres under tea cultivation in 1866 had, by 1905, been expanded to more than 50,000 (Hunter, 1876, p. 165; O'Malley, 1907, p. 94). Combining botanical knowledge and commercial endeavour, this large-scale transformation of unorganised jungle into neatly organised 'tea

<sup>139</sup> Even in the highly formal reporting of the Bengal District Gazetteer for Darjeeling this nostalgia shows up in the comparison of temperature averages for Darjeeling with those of London (O'Malley, 1907, p. 22).

gardens' crucially supported the aesthetic moulding of the Darjeeling landscape.<sup>140</sup>

The result of such interventions was, as Kennedy argues, that, "over time, hills stations were drawn so tightly within the aesthetic confines of British landscape traditions that they became divorced from the surrounding environment, particularly when that environment was as intimidating as the Himalayas" (Kennedy, 1996, p. 52). The rough Himalayan environment was recast as friendly hills increasingly regarded, among the British, as preferable to the "heat-shimmering, monotonously unvarying landscape" of the plains (Kennedy, 1996, p. 61). Through a combination of representations and interventions, the jungle of Darjeeling was turned into tea gardens, and – as the word 'hill station' itself indicates – the sharp ridges turned into homely rounded hills (cf. Kennedy, 1996, p. 46). The aesthetic moulding of the Darjeeling area as a hill station landscape thus removed it not only from the plains of 'village India' but also from the wild hills of the north-eastern subcontinent.

In his detailed book on the British hill stations, Dane Kennedy argues that the British, in the hill stations, essentially sought a space that they could mould more freely than the plains already crowded with foreign people and customs (Kennedy, 1996, pp. 60-61). In this vein, descriptions of early encounters with the area Darjeeling area repeatedly pose it as "virtually uninhabited" "*terra incognita*" (Rose, 1994, p. 105) (O'Malley, [2001] 1907, p. 283). As Hunter states in his description of the first survey of the entire Darjeeling district, "there are no villages in the proper sense of the term" (Hunter, 1876, p. 40). While the certainty of this description seems dubious given the limited

<sup>140</sup> See (J. Sharma, 2011) for a comparable perspective from Assam.

scope of early British settlement, the problems encountered in enumerating the population of the area, and probable movements back and forth over the border before the British arrived (Hunter, 1876, pp. 40-41; Hutt, 1997, p. 112) it obviously poses the Darjeeling hills and its population in a very different light than the 'village India' of the 'crowded' plains.

Like the other hill station areas, Darjeeling could, however, not be fully regarded as a '*terra nullius*' free of "the imprint of Indians" (Kennedy, 1996, p. 63).<sup>141</sup> Hence, in a confluence of science, commerce, military conscription and romanticism, similar to that informing the shaping of the landscape, the inhabitants of the Darjeeling hills were likewise represented as markedly different from both the plains-dwellers and the inhabitants of the wilder hills of neighbouring Assam. The hill stations, in other words, reflected and reinforced assumptions of social and racial difference that largely followed the environmental distinction between the hills as the plains (Kenny, 1995, p. 695). As Judith Kenny describes it, "by ascribing qualities of gentleness, grace, and simplicity to the hill tribes, the British representations contributed to the 'imaginative geographies' of the hills and plains (...) depict[ing] highland and lowland peoples as intrinsically different, as two places and two people" (Kenny, 1995, p. 709).

Of the people that the British encountered in Darjeeling, the Lepchas – seen as the original inhabitants – were widely described as "a fine, frank race, naturally open hearted and free handed, fond of change, and given to the out-door life" (Hunter, 1876, p. 47). The

<sup>141</sup> See also (Cerwonka, 2004) on the notion of '*terra nullius*' as played out in relation to the Australian landscape.

various groups labelled as 'Nepali' or 'Gurkha' were also described as "light and nimble" and as having "a pleasing expression of countenance" (O'Malley, [2001] 1907, p. 317). Seen exclusively as labour immigrants to the area, they were however considered to be of a more "pushing, thriving" and "virile race" – "quick-tempered" but "remarkably willing and loyal, if treated with consideration" (Hunter, 1876, p. 53; O'Malley, 1907, p. 51). As such, they became a favoured 'race' for recruitment into the British 'Gurkha' regiments when, after the 1857 rebellion, the British became increasingly distrustful of the other 'martial races'. The 'Gurkhas' were furthermore widely employed in the expanding tea industry and hence largely provided the labour for the physical transformation of the hill station into the orderly aesthetic of the 'tea garden'. In each their way, the (colonial imagination of) the Darjeeling inhabitants thus supported the distinction between the plains and the hills.

In summary, the colonial imagination of the hill station assembles a range of different interest and perspectives that, taken together, produce the hill station as a ruly and civilised place. This imagination essentially describes a merger of the governmental gaze with the gaze of the tourist or explorer (see Urry, 2001). Many documents from the colonial period combine the statistics and ethnographic descriptions of the gazetteers and other governmental documentation with the perspective of the tourist. E. C. Doze's *A Concise History of Darjeeling*, the first local history of Darjeeling, e.g. commences with a picture of the beautiful view of Kanchenjunga one can obtain when travelling to Darjeeling followed by a range of "hints to visitors" about how to book train tickets, get the best seats, and avoid mountain sickness (Dozey, 1922, p. x). Here, as in the 1857 *Darjeeling*

*Guide* mentioned above, the more detached descriptions of the landscape and people of the gazetteers combine with colourful descriptions of the sights, sounds and experiences the hill station has to offer the tourist visitor. As I illustrate in the following section, this merger of gazes continue largely unabated across the national historical watershed of 1947 and into the present discourse of the West Bengal state.

#### **Repeated Connections: The Governmental Gaze and the Tourist Gaze**

Although fundamentally relying on the contemporary scientific and aesthetic dispositions of the British colonists, the merger of the governmental gaze with that of the tourist is to a striking degree repeated in the post-colonial discourse on Darjeeling. For the new rulers in Calcutta, Darjeeling continued to be a 'hill station' with all the associated meanings after the stroke of midnight in 1947. Here, in spite of the anti-colonial rhetoric of Indian nationalism, the colonial history and heritage of Darjeeling continues to be celebrated. In addition, new connections with global heritage regimes and tea branding repeat and reinforce the merger of governmental and tourist gazes in the continued re-imagination of Darjeeling as a peaceful hill station. As a consequence, a global sense of Darjeeling as a commodified (non-)place, seen from the outside perspective of the tourist and of a government at-a-distance circumscribes the local production of Darjeeling as a place.

To take one example, the Government of West Bengal in 2001 republished O'Malley's 1907 Bengal District Gazetteer for Darjeeling. In this version, the gazetteer is compiled together with reprints of the 1857 *Darjeeling Guide*, a 1921 guide to *Darjeeling and its Mountain Railway* describing in minute detail the sights and sounds experienced

along the way from the Siliguri plains to Darjeeling, and a facsimile of the very letter that granted the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway UNESCO world heritage status.<sup>142</sup> The compiled publication commences with a lengthy introduction written by Kumud Ranjan Biswas, a former MP and member of the then dominant communist party (CPM).<sup>143</sup> Although the gazetteer is fundamentally a highly technocratic document of colonial domination, Biswas' introduction reflects a very different attitude. With the title *A Summer Place* it represents Darjeeling in the by now familiar and romantic light of the harmonious hill station while O'Malley's publication itself is compared to "good wine" – the "fruits of his labour of love". Poetry, beauty and love are central to Biswas's description, but the repertoire he refers to is strikingly British. Along with the inevitable reference to the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, Biswas finds space for an overwhelming amount of references to British poets – especially the romantics Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley.

Throughout his introduction it is clear that, for Biswas, it is the British gaze and organized interventions that are constitutive of Darjeeling as a place. In Biswas' rendering, their interventions in construction, forest protection and tea plantations gave birth to Darjeeling:

Ever since it was built by the British in the early part of the nineteenth century the magnificent hill station of Darjeeling has

<sup>142</sup> The full publication is available electronically through the West Bengal State Central Library's online depository: <http://dspace.wbpublibnet.gov.in:8080/jspui/handle/10689/2958> (accessed November 2012).

<sup>143</sup> Biswas was elected in 1977, 1982 and 1987. The Communist Party of India (Marxists) headed the government of West Bengal for 34 consecutive years between 1977 and 2011.

attracted travelers from all over the world. (...) To make it more homely they planted oaks and junipers and many other exotic plants and trees. Forest were reserved and felling of trees was strictly controlled. (...) Charming little cottages came to adorn its terraced slopes. Roads and railways were laid to make it more easily accessible. (...) In time it became the beloved of all irrespective of the differences in rank and riches. (Biswas, 2001, p. xii)

Here, the historical beginning of Darjeeling is, firstly, connected directly to the agency of the British – a perspective that is repeated ubiquitously across a variety of both academic and political texts on Darjeeling (Bagchi, 2012; Dasgupta, 1999; GJM, 2009; Samanta, 2000; Sarkar, 2010; T. B. Subba, 1992). Hence, the very constitution of Darjeeling is both placed in the hands and seen through the eyes of the British.

Secondly, Biswas' description obviously presents a highly selective view of the colonial past. In this view, the British superior abilities to make Darjeeling a pleasant, organised place comes out clearly and is emphasised by his subsequent statement that the present mismanagement is gradually turning the place into a "veritable jungle" again (O'Malley, [2001] 1907, p. xv). In the emphasis on the care taken by British forest reservation and control, the massive scale of British tree felling across the colonial hill stations – i.e. the very reason for the need of such measures – is obscured (see Kennedy, 1996). Similarly, the exclusiveness of the British hill station in terms of class and race is forgotten when the Darjeeling is described as "the beloved of all irrespective of the differences in rank and riches" (see Kenny, 1995). Indeed, the bourgeois perspective of the colonial masters is strikingly repeated in Biswas' contemporary recommendation for people to visit

Darjeeling reminding everyone that “life is not all work, there should also be some time to play” (Biswas, 2001, p. xiv).

Finally, in line with the analysis above, Biswas draws a clear line between beautiful hills of Darjeeling and those further east. Moving, for once, away from the British romantics he refers to the beautiful scenery of Tagore's *Shesher Kabita*. Although the novel is set in Shillong – the capital of Assam at the time – Biswas quickly seeks to divorce the beauty of Tagore's novel from the unruly north east. Referring to Tagore's love for and occasional visits to Darjeeling, Biswas states “when a Bengali reads Rabindranaths' *Shesher Kabita* there is hardly any doubt that it is not the Shillong hills (...) but the hills of Darjeeling that is in the background of his mind” (O'Malley, [2001] 1907, p. xi). Hence, once again, the harmonious nature of the Darjeeling hill-scape is placed in opposition to the wilder neighbouring hills.

With the emphasis on Darjeeling as a romantic, peaceful and harmonious place, the hill station perspective obviously avoids any mention of the Gorkhaland movement in the late 80's. A main reference point for Biswas' description is in fact Satyajit Ray's 1962 movie *Kanchanjanga*. This movie plays out various stories of love and relationships with the scenic setting of Darjeeling as a background. In Biswas' words, the film is “a tribute to Darjeeling and the sublime beauty of the hills” (O'Malley, [2001] 1907, p. ix). The historical somersault made by the references is however both striking and widespread. Ray's *Kanchanjanga* is, like the recent movie *Barfi!* – acclaimed as the Brand ambassador for Darjeeling – set well before the violent eruption of the Gorkhaland movement in the Darjeeling hills (A. Banerjee, 2012). Both movies use the historic, heritage sites of

Darjeeling as the backdrop for a love story. In *Barfi!* we encounter the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Station at Ghoom, the old Planters Club etc. and, in the words of the director Anurag Basu, “this periodic film set in the 70s has been able to successfully capture the true spirit of Darjeeling” (A. Banerjee, 2012). Hence, to retain the harmonic image of Darjeeling, a complicated historical loop is constructed in which the “true spirit” of the present brand Darjeeling is to be found before the Gorkhaland demand was raised.

Other branded constructions of Darjeeling bring about similar effects. Today, roughly 10 million kg. of tea is produced in Darjeeling each year. However, estimates state that about 40 million kg. of tea labelled Darjeeling is consumed every year. While the blame for the sale of ‘fake’ Darjeeling is variously placed upon the Darjeeling tea producers themselves and on others, the numbers alone indicate the brand equity of the Darjeeling label. Over the last decades various initiatives have been taken to protect this power in the global market. “Darjeeling” has been internationally certified as a Geographical Indications (GI) product under the WTO ‘Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights’ (TRIPS) Agreement, and national legislation has been enacted to protect the Darjeeling brand (see e.g. Das, 2006). In the process, a logo and a range of certification procedures have been advised (see illustration below). While these initiatives are, on the one hand, obviously directed at furthering the interests of the producers of a specific product by branding it to Darjeeling as an ‘authentic’ place, they, on the other hand also contribute to the assignment of meaning to Darjeeling as a place. While the tea is branded Darjeeling, Darjeeling is also branded in terms of tea.



Illustration 10: The Darjeeling Tea Logo

As a brand, Darjeeling naturally seeks to bring out the unique characters of the product, characters that can help distinguish it in the global market for tea and hence allow it to bring home a higher price. Here, the specific characteristics of the Darjeeling hills are foregrounded. As the magazine *Tea & Coffee* states, “it is just something about the hills of Darjeeling that makes tea... Darjeeling” (Levy, 2007). To bring out this special “something”, this intangible value that is employed to provide the Darjeeling tea producers with another very tangible value – a better price for their goods – descriptions largely fall back on the complex of beauty, tradition and romance attached to the hill station across colonial and post-colonial state discourse. “There is no doubt that the quality of the tea produced here is affected by the magic of its fairy tale surroundings” (Levy, 2007) It is, ostensibly, the combination of the beauty in the “magical, mystical” hills of Darjeeling, on the one hand, and the traditional, “orthodox” methods of tea production handed down from the British founders of the tea plantations that enable the production of Darjeeling tea only here (Levy, 2007).

### Conclusion

In summary, the branding of Darjeeling tea as a geographical indications product globally rearticulates and reinforces the historical

ascription of meaning to Darjeeling as a hill station. Although less widely known, the same could be said of the UNESCO world heritage certification of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. These certifications stage Darjeeling as a place in front of the external gaze of the global middle-class consumer-tourist. They represent Darjeeling through the organized, picturesque scenery of its colonial history, rather than the ‘unruliness’ of its recent history. Here neither the independence movement confrontations between colonialist and nationalist, nor the Gorkhaland movement confrontations between state marginalization and local mobilization are registered. When strikes and violence erupts, as in the 80s and repeatedly since then, it is typically seen as intermittent. Across newspaper reports, various versions of the phrase “return to peace” is often used. In sharp contrast to the ‘durable disorder’ of the north-eastern hills, ‘unruliness’ in the Darjeeling hills is thus seen as periodic rather than perpetual. In the imagination of the hill station, peace and harmony is insistently seen as the natural state of affairs.

Repeating the colonial merger of the governmental gaze and the gaze of the tourist-consumer, the place-making dynamics of globalised branding and heritage certification largely remove the making of Darjeeling as a place from Darjeeling as a locality. If decisions about Darjeeling have – in the partition of India, in discussions of the ‘tribal question’ and in the on-going reorganisation of the Indian state – been taken large from the outside, this outside has moved further away. Hence, although present decision-making might be more globally dispersed than under the British Empire, a sense of imperial government-at-distance remains lodged within the place-making dynamics of Darjeeling. As a consequence, Darjeeling largely remains



in an ambivalent position in the political landscape of India: disconnected from the plains of village India as well as from the 'unruly' hills of the north-east, concomitantly entangled in colonial signification across the midnight of 1947 and the violent uprising of the Gorkhaland movement.

## Chapter 8: Darjeeling Disquiet

*(...) there was a report of new dissatisfaction in the hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns. It was the Indian-Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs. Here, where India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim (...) it had always been a messy map. (Desai, 2006, p. 9)*

Seen across the stretch of a couple of centuries, the situation of the ‘Nepali’ population in Darjeeling is complicated and rife with paradoxes. In the mid-nineteenth century many arrived to work for the British tea planters, clearing the forest and establishing tea gardens. During the following decades, their manual labour enabled the British to eliminate the unorganised jungle shaping the Darjeeling hills in the romantic image of the hill station. Fuelled by the desires of commercial endeavours and scientific exploration, Darjeeling gradually emerged as a place of beauty and leisure, a tourist destination, a reference point for globally acclaimed tea, and finally a world heritage site. Albeit ostensibly describing Darjeeling as a place, this image is, however, largely everywhere but in Darjeeling. Hence, as generations of ‘Nepalis’ call for a greater say in decisions on their local environment, they have to face the images of Darjeeling as a globalised non-place – an image crucially enabled by the hard labour of their parents and grand-parents.

In this chapter, I investigate the meeting between the hill station image of Darjeeling described in the preceding chapter and the Gorkhaland movement. I argue, that the tourist gaze still plays an important role in the global production of Darjeeling as a place. Along with the old colonial buildings of Darjeeling, the toy train and the tea

gardens, the tourist presence and practice in town reinforce the notion that this is what Darjeeling is essentially about – that Darjeeling is still a peaceful Himalayan hill station. I show how neither Subbash Ghisingh’s Gorkhaland of the late 80’s nor Bimal Gurung’s contemporary Gorkhaland actually present an alternative ascription of meaning to Darjeeling. Hence, the Hill station imagination lives on in present tourist initiatives and even today seems to provide a point of convergence between the Gorkhaland movement and the state government in Calcutta. Despite disagreements and calls for statehood and autonomy, what seems to be emerging looks more like an imperial arrangement of government at distance symbolically assembled around a contemporary refashioning of the hill station.

In the following, I commence with a brief history of the Gorkhaland movement, combined with a few reflections on my own futile search for representations Gorkhaland as a place. I then turn to the 80’s Gorkhaland movement. I analyse how central documents published by the West Bengal government maintain an image of the harmonious hill station even in the face of violent uprising, and how speeches held by Subbash Ghising, seem directed rather at unsettling Darjeeling and harnessing anxiety, than at place-making. I then move on to the present Gorkhaland movement, analysing political publications as well as public spectacles. My argument is that the question about what Gorkhaland is, remains largely unanswered, overshadowed by a spectacular display directed more towards who controls Darjeeling and, also, that today the refashioned image of the hill station brings together, once again, the governmental gaze and the tourist gaze in a convergence between the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha and the new government of West Bengal.

**Searching for Gorkhaland**

In the late 1980s, Subbas Ghising's Gorkhaland movement suddenly brought a new representation of the Darjeeling hills into state and national media. This stands in a marked contrast to the representation of the area in the image of the hills station. Instead of a place of beauty and harmony, it surrounds Darjeeling with notions of anxiety, of internal colonisation, of being out of place. As presented in chapter four, the Darjeeling hills had already laid ground to a variety of different territorial proposals. Nonetheless, its position had, throughout the processes of territorial reorganisation largely been decided from the outside following colonial lines of differentiation. However, this time the proposal of a Gorkhaland state was put forward more forcefully than ever. Large areas in the hills were shut down for long periods of time, arms were being acquired or made, and clashes between the newly founded Gorkhaland National Liberation Front (GNLF) and the police left many dead and wounded. The intensity of these events destabilised the position of the area as a place in the territorialised political landscapes of West Bengal and India more than ever before.

Periodically disrupted negotiations between the GNLF, the West Bengal state government, and the central government finally led to an agreement signed July 25, 1988. The demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland was not met, but it was agreed to set up an "Autonomous Hill Council" – the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). In October 1988 a state act was passed officially instituting the DGHC and elections were held for the 28 elected seats in December 1988. GNLF won 26 of the elected seats and the Communist Party of India (Marxists) (CPI(M)) the remaining two. Ghisingh was made the

chairman and chief executive councillor of the DGHC.<sup>144</sup> Over the next two decades, this position enabled Ghisingh to concentrate power in what one observer has called a "local ethnic autocracy" (Lacina, 2009). Ghisingh was re-elected twice, and after delaying the elections scheduled for 2004, he was declared administrator of the DGHC without elections (Dam, 2005). However, with his role as the uncontested king of the hills becoming more and more obvious, rumours about him being a "traitor" co-opted by the CPI(M) state government flourished. The tide was about to turn against him.

When I arrived in Darjeeling during the run-up to the state elections in April 2011, the Gorkhaland demand was back, but the proponents were new: Bimal Gurung and his Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) had taken over. Formerly working under Ghisingh, Gurung suddenly gained popularity in 2007 through the curious series of events describes in the introduction to this study. Gurung had been running a local fan club for Prashant Tamang, a 'Gorkha' boy from Darjeeling, who was one of the contestants in the televised talent show Indian Idol 3. As he won the last round in the autumn of 2007, his success spilled over on Gurung. Gurung, in turn, began to oppose Ghisingh and launched a new Gorkhaland movement. Although not as violent as in the 80's, the new movement continued the heavy-handed politics of earlier times. On 21 May 2010, Madan Tamang, president of the All India Gorkha League (ABGL) and a vocal opponent of GJM and Bimal Gurung, was killed in public in Darjeeling town. In February 2011, two GJM supporters were killed by the police in Shibsua, Dooars further

<sup>144</sup> Another 14 members were to be nominated by the state government that, according to Subba, filled 13 of these seats with CPI(M) members - "One post had to be left vacant due to the fleeing of Jan Bahadur Rai, the Chaiman of Kalimpong Municipality, to Siliguri" (T. B. Subba, 1992, p. 157).

adding to the tension in the hills as well as to the demand for Gorkhaland.

In spring 2011, the Gorkhaland demand was back at centre stage and newly repainted on shop-fronts and walls in the public spaces of the town. The urban space of Darjeeling, presented itself as a virtual canvas for slogans and symbols. While one would occasionally meet election posters from other parties, the GJM was massively represented on walls, shop fronts and vehicles. The green-white-yellow colours of the GJM flag provided a ubiquitous background to most of the “Gorkhaland” inscriptions around town visually fusing the GJM party and the Gorkhaland agenda. The colours of the GJM flag were also repeated ubiquitously on light-posts, benches, hand-rails and wall decorations throughout the centre of the town. Through numerous signs on wall and shop fronts, this specific colour scheme and the word “Gorkhaland” merged – clearly signalling that Gorkhaland was now spelled GJM. There was, obviously, an anxious concern about situating GJM and the Gorkhaland agenda for everyone to see – as something tangible – within the public space of the town of Darjeeling (see illustrations below).



*Illustration 11: The GJM colour scheme on the bandstand at Darjeeling's main pedestrian square Chowrasta*



*Illustration 12: One of the many colour coordinated signs in central Darjeeling*

Before going to Darjeeling, I had begun reading Christopher Townsend Middleton's excellent dissertation (2010) on the ethnic politics of the area. On arrival, I expected to meet the vibrant ethnic politics that he describes with reference to the mid-2000s. Things had, however, apparently changed quickly since then. As it turned out, 'ethnic' activities were largely in a state of forced “hibernation” as the town was preparing for the state elections. In these, and in the current

party politics, the common Gorkhaland front could not afford to be broken down into individual ethnic claims. Instead, I thought that I would be witness to a micro-politics of place-making aimed at bringing forth Gorkhaland as a tangible and important place in the political landscape. However, across my encounters with informants, my reading of documents and attendance at public gatherings the *what* of Gorkhaland remained strikingly elusive. What instead appeared was a strong focus on *who* was in control of a Darjeeling that, with the continuous presence of tourists in town, continued to resemble the image of the colonial hills station.

My initial question for investigation – what sort of place Gorkhaland is made out to be? – has thus largely remained unanswered. Various stabs at including additional textual material after returning from Darjeeling didn't seem to help. But if the contours of Gorkhaland as a place-to-be does not characterise neither the discourse nor the practices of the various movements for Gorkhaland, what does then motivate these movements? What are they about, and how do they relate to the widespread and commodified 'hill station' image of Darjeeling presented earlier? And finally, why is Gorkhaland still so ubiquitously on display – in GJM colours – across Darjeeling? What I find can be described two parallel movements. One describes a trajectory from an 'anxiety of belonging' (amplified under Ghisingh's leadership) to an 'anxiety of control' evolving with the urban, public space of Darjeeling town. The other describes a development from the tacit tactics of state evasion presented in chapter four, towards spectacular strategies of state engagement. Across these two trajectories, a politics emerges which seem to be less about producing Gorkhaland as a place, and more about posing specific actors as locally

sovereign partners with which the state can negotiate political and territorial demands.

### **Harnessing Anxieties in a Darjeeling Disquiet?**

In this section, I analyse the meeting of the first Gorkhaland agitation with the hill station imagination of Darjeeling. I show how Subbash Ghising utilises the anxieties of being out of place among the 'Nepali' population and how he concomitantly seems to unsettle, rather than substantiate an answer to the question of what Gorkhaland is. And I illustrate how, on the other side of the conflict, the West Bengal government replays colonial representations of Darjeeling. Taken together, this meeting poses Darjeeling as an essentially harmonious place suddenly struck by unlikely unruliness.

During the first Gorkhaland conflict, a lengthy 'information war' took place between the GNLF and the ruling CPI(M). In his widely read reflections on the Gorkhaland conflict, Tanka Subba describes how this war was conducted through the publication and circulation of various documents and speeches across the Darjeeling hills:

The Gorkhas or Nepalis have propagated a history of Darjeeling and its peoples while the state government, which is controlled absolutely by the Bengalis, has presented another history of the region and the peoples. Thousands of audio cassettes carrying Subhas Ghisingh's version of Darjeeling's history were circulated. Probably even greater number of the copies of the "Information Document" in two volumes were circulated by the West Bengal Government and the party functionaries of the CPI (M). An information war, rather disinformation war, or at best propaganda war, overshadowed many

political activities in West Bengal in 1986 and 1987. (T. B. Subba, 1992, p. 27)<sup>145</sup>

As Subba points out, territorial history and the connected issue of belonging is an important line of conflict running through these documents. Thus, while “the GNLF and its predecessors (...) ascertained that Darjeeling was never part of Bengal (...) the West Bengal Government equally emphasized that it was never a part of Nepal” (T. B. Subba, 1992, p. 29). I would argue, however, that the ‘information war’ documents display some other interesting characteristics. As I see it, the discursive and rhetorical strategies employed during the conflict display a very asymmetric positioning in relation to Darjeeling. While Ghisingh seeks to unsettle the area, the West Bengal government seek to fixate it as a place within a specific colonial imagination.

Many of Ghisingh’s speeches, interviews and orchestrated practices seem directed more towards unsettling the Darjeeling area than connecting it to a fixed meaning as a place. The widely circulated speech that Subba mentions, actually says preciously little about what kind of place Gorkhaland is. Ghisingh instead combines a confusing historical sketch of the area – vaguely alluding to some kings in the twelfth century and the late eighteenth century Gorkha conquest – with a complex and convoluted analysis of the legal situation of the ‘Gorkhas’ in India. As Middleton suggests, the main objective seems to be a nourishing of anxiety, harnessing its energy for a movement led by

<sup>145</sup> The audio cassettes contained a speech held by Subhas Ghisingh in June 1985 in Kurseong, later published by the DGHC transcribed under the heading “The Historical Speech” (M. P. Lama, 1996, p. 22). The two “information documents” were published by the CPI(M) dominated government under the common heading “Gorkhaland Agitation” (Government of West Bengal, 1986, 1987) along with at least one propaganda pamphlet brought out directly by the state committee of the CPI(M) (Ranadive, 1986).

Ghisingh (see Middleton, 2010, pp. 150-155). Stray mentions of the recent expulsion of Nepalis from Assam, of being “orphaned”, “not bonafide citizens of India” and “hired tenants” dot the speech along with familiar notions of the brave Gorkhas. The collective practice of burning the Indo-Nepal Treaty and the Sugauli Treaty orchestrated by the GNLF seems similarly to indicate not only a harnessing of the anxious belonging of the ‘Nepalis’ in Darjeeling, but also an attempted unsettlement or de-territorialisation of the Darjeeling space.

What emerges from Ghisingh’s speech, is an unclear but insistent emphasis on the area’s unsettled position within the political landscape of the borderland. Mixing historical and legal complications, Ghisingh indicates that the area was left dangling between Nepal and India when the British left the subcontinent. Did the British propose the area to the Gorkhas only to have the All India Gorkha League reject the proposal? Was it given to Nepal as a “buffer province”? Should there have been a “plebiscite”? Was the Sugauli treaty nullified when the British left the subcontinent? And does the Indo-Nepal treaty stand “rejected and nullified” as Nepal is declared a “Zone of Peace”? (M. P. Lama, 1996, pp. 25-26). The speech alludes to all these options suggesting that “the proper settlement of Darjeeling and Teesta has not come so far, not the settlement of our fate” (M. P. Lama, 1996, p. 26). To this situation, the only solution is Gorkhaland – but what this means remains opaque. It seems, as Middleton suggests in reference to the 2008 Gorkhaland agitation, that “‘Gorkhaland’ has become the telos, the ultimate realization of affect’s embodied potentiality. A future. A promise land.” (Middleton, 2010, p. 156). As such, Gorkhaland is not represented as a place, not even a place-to-be, but more like a fata

morgana simmering in the horizon – fuelling desires but essentially ungraspable.

In contrast to this, the first ‘information document’ published by the Government of West Bengal foregrounds a ‘historical outline’ of the Darjeeling hills. As Subba points out, this document emphasises that “there is no historical evidence of [the Darjeeling hills] ever being part of Nepal” (Government of West Bengal, 1986, p. 4). However, in terms of representing Darjeeling as a place, the document does much more. It provides a representation of Darjeeling that seamlessly incorporates the gaze of the colonial archives into the contemporary history and politics of the area. After a brief mention that the area was part of the Sikkim and Bhutan kingdoms earlier, the historical account only really enters the area with the British in 1835. Here, the gaze of the colonial and the post-colonial state blends. The grant of lease in 1835, the following annexation of further areas from Sikkim, and the later capture of the Dooars areas from Bhutan are all described as situations in which areas were “included in India” – not brought under British colonial domination (Government of West Bengal, 1986, p. 4). With this historical starting-point, the Gorkha conquest of the area can be dismissed as something taking place “long before the district of Darjeeling took shape” – utterly irrelevant to the history of the district.

Along the colonial archives, the area is then described as “practically uninhabited” when the British arrives in 1835 (Government of West Bengal, 1986, p. 5). A somewhat misleading reading of colonial census figures proves this point in the document. Here, the figure of 100 inhabitants, as it was judged by Archibald Campbell upon arrival to Darjeeling and only related to the small settlement on the Darjeeling hill, is directly compared to later figures

covering much larger areas: the 10,000 inhabitants Campbell guessed lived in Darjeeling and the surrounding hills in 1850 and the 94,712 inhabitants registered in in the first Census of the whole district in 1872. This assertion of ‘emptiness’ before the British arrived on the scene has some resemblances to notions of *terra nullius* (empty land) in other colonial contexts (Cerwonka, 2004; Massey, 2005). While for the British it might have served as legitimisation for taking over the land, in this ‘information document’ it furthermore supports a notion that the area was only a real place after the British arrived – after all, what can we make of an uninhabited space “almost entirely under forest”?

Additionally, if the land was empty – both of people and meaning-as-a-place – in 1835 then everyone living there today must, logically, be a migrant. Only a small number of Bhutias and Lepchas lived there before. As the document further points out, “both the Nepalis and the Bengalis came to the territory as immigrants following the development of the tea industry and the expansion of the administration” (Government of West Bengal, 1986, p. 4). Subsequently, the Nepalis are described as “a pushing, thriving race” – quoting directly from Hunter’s 1907 gazetteer without qualification or comment (Government of West Bengal, 1986, pp. 5-6). The document, in other words, uncritically reproduces a colonial discourse not only on migration history but also on race.

Finally, on the very first page, the information document brings out a representation of the area that resonates uncannily well with the image of the colonial hill station described earlier. Before going into a range of ‘socio-economic’ figures, the document foregrounds that:

The peaceful Himalayan region of West Bengal, with a Nepalese majority, is largely known for its tea gardens and scenic beauty and

is a major tourist attraction in the country. Tea, Tourism and Timber, the three Ts form the backbone of the hill economy. (Government of West Bengal, 1986, p. 1)

As in a hill station tourist brochure, the Darjeeling area – at the time regularly shut down by *bandhs* (close-down strikes) and hit by violent clashes – is characterised as inherently peaceful, beautiful and attractive. The violence taking place in Darjeeling must, therefore, be temporary and external to Darjeeling as a place. It must be fuelled simply by the “anti-nationalist” and “secessionist” agitation of the GNLFF. And it is probably – as especially CPI (M) senior politician Ranadive’s separate pamphlet emphasises – incited by the “invisible hand” of “foreign influence” (Government of West Bengal, 1986, pp. v, 30; Ranadive, 1986).

The beauty and tranquillity of the hill station landscape is then utilised as the aesthetic backdrop to describe a ‘normal’ situation of “communal harmony” among a diverse range of tea garden workers:

The lush green tea estates are a microcosm of the Indian entity where the Nepalis, tribals from Bihar, Bengalis, Lepchas, Bhutias, Mech and other hill and non-hill tribes work side by side, and come to know each other, and strengthen their bonds as working people irrespective of their linguistic, ethnic, religious and other differences. The struggles fought by the trade unions in the tea gardens over many decades have brought about a working class consciousness and solidarity which transcends other loyalties and bonds. (Government of West Bengal, 1986, p. 28)

Strikingly, for an avowed communist document, this “working class consciousness and solidarity” knows no ‘other’ in the “lush green tea estates”. Hence, the widespread ethnic split between Bengali owners and managers, on the one hand, and Nepali manual labourers, on the

other, is nowhere to be found in the text.<sup>146</sup> The beauty of the Darjeeling hill and tea garden are, rather, invoked to propagate that, “until the recent happenings” everyone “lived peacefully and amicably” and that “the atmosphere of in the hills of Darjeeling was in keeping with the *excellent tradition of communal harmony* in the rest of the state” (Government of West Bengal, 1986, pp. 6, my emphasis).

This representation of Darjeeling as a peaceful place, with all its ‘imperial debris’, all its reminiscences from the image of the colonial hill station, was also widely circulated in news reports even around the peak of the conflict.<sup>147</sup> While the violence in the hills is of course the main focus of report – the news – the beauty and tranquillity ostensibly characterising ‘normal life’ in the hills is repeatedly brought in as a backdrop in introductions and headings. The article *Darjeeling Disquiet* begins with the statement:

To the list of India’s troublespots, one more name has now been added – Darjeeling. This idyllic hill station first developed by the British after they obtained it from Sikkim on an annual rent of Rs. 6000 ‘way back in 1835, has been in the grip of an agitation involving a section of its Nepali population’ (Economic Times, 1986).

Another article published in *The Sunday Observer* a few months later commences with the following paragraph:

<sup>146</sup> Michael Hutt e.g. states that: “In the main industries of Darjeeling district (tea, timber, and tourism), Nepalis constitute the vast majority of the workforce, but are almost wholly absent from the ownership or management of any concern. Such positions are invariably occupied by plainspeople.” (1997, p. 119). Swatahsiddha Sarkar presents a similar view in a recent article stating that: “there is no denying the fact that in the spheres of tea plantation and white collar job sector the plainsmen, mostly the Bengalis, have enjoyed an advantageous position ever since the history of the hills station” (2010, p. 112).

<sup>147</sup> There is a large compilation of news reports from the period in the DGHC publication (M. P. Lama, 1996).



The Nepalese in their inimitable manner, have given themselves an absolute gem of a word – “Kunni”, which means; “I don’t know, and I couldn’t be bothered to find out.” This writer will wager his finest silk kurta that were one to descend (due to the GNLF roadblocks) on any one of the tea bushes in Darjeeling’s 45-plus tea estates, and ask the astute Nepalese there what all the fuss and fury was about, pat would come a succinct “Kunni”. So, how an extremely breathtaking and tranquil mountainscape has turned truculent is surely a complex, contradictory story. (The Sunday Observer, 1986)

Referring explicitly to the tranquillity of the land, and implicitly to the peaceful character of the Nepalis – the “simple ‘sathi’” (friend) as the latter article calls them – these and other articles dramatize the current situation on the backdrop of a different, ‘normal’ past. A past that resonates uncannily with colonial representations of the idyllic hill station and simple mountain folk.

#### **Gorkhaland as a Pragmatic Solution for the Hill Station**

In this section, I analyse the political publications of the contemporary Gorkhaland movement. I show how these texts present Gorkhaland more in terms of a pragmatic solution to a political problem than in terms directed at producing a new meaning for the area. And I show how, in the lack of any new meaning, the tried and tested image of the Darjeeling hill station imposes itself even on the pages of the Gorkhaland movements own publications.

When the Gorkhaland movement was renewed under Bimal Gurungs leadership in 2007 the repertoire of political mobilisation, public practises and discourse repeated many elements from the 80s. Strikes were held shutting down traffic in the hills for periods at a time, ‘black-flag’ rallies assembled, and copies of legal agreements burnt in the streets. The 1986 GNLF pamphlet *Why Gorkhaland? A Case for*

*the Formation of a Separate State* was replaced with the similar-sounding GJM pamphlet *Why Gorkhaland?*. Still, some shift of focus had taken place. Many activities and speeches directed anger and resentment towards Ghisingh and the DGHC rather than the national establishment in general. The legal agreements burnt were no longer, as under Ghisingh, the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty, but the 1988 agreement between Ghisingh, the union and the state government instituting the by now despised hill council. ‘Gandhian’ hunger strikes supplemented the repertoire of movement practices and arguments brought forward were substantially more nationalist in their references than under Ghisingh. Nonetheless, across changes and continuities in political strategy, the representations of Gorkhaland as a distinct, ‘anthropological’ place continue to be elusive – giving way to generic administrative representations – easily legible by the state – and a co-optation of the (commodified) ‘hill station’ imagination of the area.

Although the ‘anxiety of belonging’ for the Gorkhas still provides the main background for the movement, Gurung and the GJM’s political discourse does not (need to) amplify this affect as much. In line with the academic and other reflective literature published since the 80s, the GJM seems to take the ‘identity crisis’ of the Gorkhas in India more as an established fact than something that needs to be brought about (see e.g. Sinha & Subba, 2003; T. B. Subba et al., 2009). In the hands of the GJM, Ghisingh’s harnessing and amplification of a precarious situation has been concentrated, rather, onto a few more concrete enemies. On top of this list stands Ghisingh himself and his idea of a sixth schedule arrangement for the Darjeeling hills. The encouraged flourishing of discreet ethnic identities in the mid-2000s have again given way to an emphasis on a common Gorkha

identity. As described by Middleton, the main Nepali festival Dasain (or Durga Puja) is now brought back into the public space of Darjeeling (Middleton, 2010, pp. 314-316). Similarly, in 2008 Gurung sought to impose a typical Nepali dress-code for all Gorkhas in Darjeeling over the tourist season (The Hindu, 2008; The Telegraph, 2008). Although this apparently didn't last long, it represented a new politics of concrete 'Gorkha' symbols played out in urban, public space – fashioning the Gorkha community in front of the tourists' gaze.

GJM's pamphlet *Why Gorkhaland?* is widely available in Darjeeling and on the internet. It presents a shorter, revised version of the document *The Case for Gorkhaland* which the GJM submitted to the Union Home Secretary during the first round of 'tripartite talks'<sup>148</sup>. On the first page, it presents the Gorkhaland movement as a "justified, peaceful, democratic, constitutional and Gandhian Movement for a separate state within the Indian Union" (GJM, 2009, p. 1). From this assertion onwards, the pamphlet and the longer document, as well as multiple interviews and speeches seek to place Gorkhaland well within the Indian nation both administratively and rhetorically. Apart from explicitly stating the movement's loyalty to the Indian nation, the documents bring out numerous references to the pantheon of Indian national heroes, they inscribe the history of the Gorkhas into the anti-colonial struggle, and phrase their oppression at the hands of the West Bengal state in the nationally despised terms of colonialism.

The 'internal colonialism' of the West Bengal state is repeatedly emphasised across the documents, turning the well-known accusations of anti-nationalism away from the Gorkhaland movement. *Why*

<sup>148</sup> Following GJM takeover in Darjeeling, these talks were initiated in September 2008. The three parties were the Union Government (led by the home ministry), the West Bengal State and the GJM.

*Gorkhaland?* e.g. states that as India became independent and Darjeeling and Dooars part of West Bengal "the area once again became a colony ruled by the new masters." (GJM, 2009, pp. 3-4). As the longer document supplements: "The inclusion of Darjeeling and the Dooars in present day Bengal *stemmed more from the desire for revenue prompted by colonial traditions rather than nationalist feelings.*" (GJM, 2008, p. 12 my emphasis). Nonetheless:

the West Bengal Government to paper over its historic oppression of the people of Darjeeling district and Dooars and its neo-colonial policies in the region (...) dubbed the movement as "anti-national" (GJM, 2008).

In contrast to this, *The Case for Gorkhaland* establishes that "the Development of the Gorkha sub-nationalism coincided with the development of Indian nationalism." Hence, the: "patriotic Indian Gorkhas have always wanted to have a home within India (GJM, 2008, p. 10) and "a separate state for the Indian Gorkhas will help the community find its own feet and march in tune with the forward movement of the great country of India" (GJM, 2008, p. 11).

Across the GJM documents, Gorkhaland is curiously described as an "area" – a generic space – rather than a place. When Gorkhaland is presented, the documents repeatedly refer back to existing administrative delineations, the number of *mouzas* (the smallest administrative unit) and the area in square kilometres. The *Why Gorkhaland?* pamphlet e.g. states that:

The total area of the proposed State of Gorkhaland comprising the present Darjeeling District and the contiguous area of Dooars in North Jalpaiguri district is approximately **6459 square kilometres**. The Total population of the proposed State of Gorkhaland is approximately **30 lakhs** as per 2001 census. (...) the district of

Darjeeling lies between 26°31' and 27°13' North latitude and between 87°89' and 88°53' East longitude. (GJM, 2009, p. 16)

*The Case for Gorkhaland* presents a similar formulation, supplemented by an appendix listing all the existing police stations and mouzas intended to be included in Gorkhaland (GJM, 2008, pp. 3, 15-16). Here, the establishment of a certain, authentic meaning as a place that one might expect to find in a pamphlet propagating local autonomy in the contemporary global conjuncture just isn't there.

Presented as an administrative space, Gorkhaland is posed largely as a pragmatic political solution to a problem of national recognition rather than a problem of local belonging and autonomy. *The Case for Gorkhaland* argues that "Gorkhaland is the dream of over a crore [10 million] of Indian Gorkhas living all over India, not merely that of the 25 odd lakh Gorkhas in Darjeeling and Dooars in West Bengal" (GJM, 2008). Hence, the issue relates not only to Darjeeling as a place, but to all Indian Gorkhas that are "only asserting their right to self-esteem in a country that they helped to build." Seen in this light, Gorkhaland could, in principle, be situated anywhere in India. The claim of the Darjeeling hills and parts of the Siliguri and Dooars plains as a separate state is simply a matter of historical conjecture. As the document states, "the battleground for the demand has perforce been located in present day West Bengal for historical and geographical reasons." (GJM, 2008, p. 10). It is, in other words, not the specific character of the Darjeeling area as a place that motivates the Gorkhaland movement, as it is presented here, but broader questions of national recognition that might – due to somewhat arbitrary historical reasons – be solved through territorial intervention in this area.

As support for the idea that Gorkhaland can provide a solution to a question of recognition *The Case for Gorkhaland* presents a curious reading of two academic texts: Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped* (1994) and Ian Barrow's *Making History, Drawing Territory* (2003). While both of these texts provide a critical, deconstructive reading of the effects of mapping and bordering territory, the GJM reading turns them into constructive propositions. As the document notes:

Both these scholars viewed a community of people as a fluid, amorphous group lacking a concrete identity until they were characterised within politically defined spaces with boundaries that could be reflected on the map. (GJM, 2008, p. 11)<sup>149</sup>

Consequently, the document uses these texts to legitimate the answer that "the delineation of geographical boundaries (...) gives a community – or a nation – an identity as a political entity" (GJM, 2008, p. 10). Hence, in relation to Gorkhaland:

"The new state will not be premised on economic solutions to the problems of a particular region. *The new state, instead, is a political entity that will create, with no ambiguity whatsoever, a political identity for a people* who were landholders in a territory that later became current day India." (GJM, 2008, pp. 11, emphasis added)

Although the latter quote mentions a more grounded form of belonging (being landholders) the main thrust of the argument presented by GJM poses Gorkhaland simply as an academically supported 'politico-administrative' solution to a more general problem of identity and recognition.

With regards to Darjeeling, the GJM documents, on the other hand, largely recycle the existing 'hill station' image – even

<sup>149</sup> In line with this, the *Why Gorkhaland?* pamphlet provides a map of the "proposed state of Gorkhaland" (GJM, 2009, p. 17).

incorporating elements from the 1986 presentation by the West Bengal government. *The Case for Gorkhaland* e.g. describes how a broad range of ethnic communities worked harmoniously together in the tea gardens of Darjeeling giving them a shared “ethno-class consciousness” (GJM, 2008, p. 4). Similarly, the more widely circulated pamphlet describes Darjeeling as follows:

Darjeeling is popular[ly] known as “Queen of Hills”, a tourist paradise. Darjeeling produces world famous tea known as the “Champagne of Tea”, which fetches sizeable foreign exchange for the country. (...) Darjeeling is also famous for its “Toy Train” which has been accorded the status of International Heritage by UNESCO. (GJM, 2009, p. 16)

Here, the document uncritically taps into a readily available repertoire of phrases to describe Darjeeling – phrases that bring up associations in line with the hill station image of the area with its global connections. In parallel, the front cover of the pamphlet displays images of a snow-clad Kanchenjunga, brave Gurkha soldiers, lush green tea gardens undergoing peaceful plucking, and the heritage Toy Train. (see illustration below).

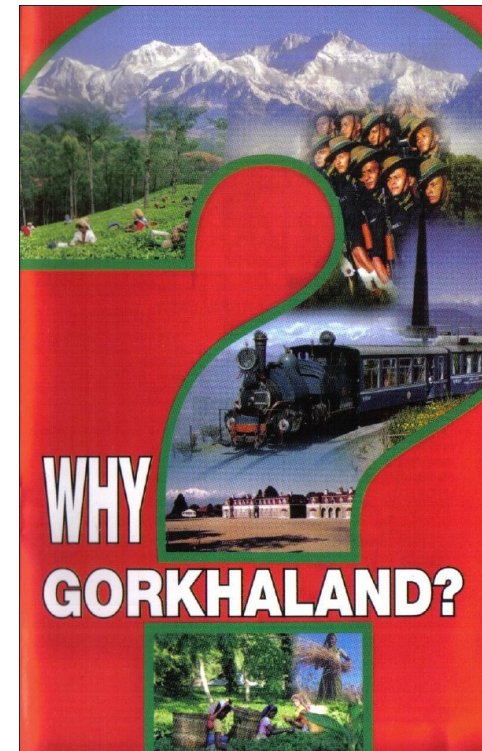


Illustration 13: *Why Gorkhaland?*

This representation of the Darjeeling area in the well-rehearsed ‘tourist-brochure’ language of beauty, harmony and heritage is, further, combined with a range of more forward-looking potential identities for the area largely presented in a similar language of commodification. Under the envisioned Gorkhaland administration, Darjeeling is presented as a potential “Agra-Export Zone”, as well as an “organic state” and “biodiversity hotspot” suited for “agro-tourism” and “hydel-power” projects (GJM, 2008, pp. 14-15). Across these representations,

it is the economic potential and the ability to ‘sell’ the area that is in focus, rather than its connection to the ‘Gorkhas’.

In summary, the recent GJM discourse seem to be less about representing Gorkhaland as an authentic homeland for the Gorkhas than one might expect. Instead of posing the area as one that holds a certain meaning for the Gorkha population, the documents present the proposal of a separate state as a pragmatic, political solution to a nation-wide question of recognition and belonging. Hence, rather than focusing on ‘rooting’ Gorkha identity in the area, the documents seems more invested in producing the GJM as the only legitimate actor to engage in a process of political bargaining over the area. To do so, the documents largely speak in a language easily amenable to state legibility: Just as the old DGHC agreement, they describe the area in terms of existing administrative units more readily available for bargaining than e.g. essential claims in terms of homeland. As the 1986 ‘information document’ before them, the documents describe the Darjeeling area through the image of the harmonious tea garden – a perspective obviously familiar to the state. And, in a future-oriented exposition, *The Case for Gorkhaland* sells the area in the – similarly well-rehearsed – language of economic development. In other words, state legibility and political bargaining seem to be valued over more ‘anthropological’ or ‘indigenous’ forms of place-making.

### Gorkhaland as Spectacle

*Jai Gorkha, jai Gorkhaland, jai Gorkha Janmukti Morcha!*

As described in the introduction to this chapter, the visual image of GJM and the Gorkhaland agenda was imposingly present in the urban public space of Darjeeling in April 2011. In this section, I argue that this presence is connected to the discursive project of posing GJM as

the only legitimate partner for external political bargaining manifested through a control of public space. Intuitively, the ubiquity of the GJM spectacle can hardly be interpreted as stemming solely from spontaneous public support. I suggest that we regard it as a spectacle directed towards the production of compliance – much like the spectacles of the Asad cult that Lisa Wedeen has analysed.<sup>150</sup> Thus, as the mitigating of the ‘Indian Nepali’ community’s ‘anxious belonging’ have shifted from tacit tactics of state evasion to spectacular strategies of state recognition, urban Darjeeling provides an important site for a spectacular display of control and orchestrating compliance – just as in colonial times (Kenny, 1995).

Already under Ghising’s Gorkhaland movement and later rule, urban public space has held an obvious, important role for staging control over the area (Sarkar, 2010, p. 115). Still today, control of the Darjeeling streets seems to work as a consciously manipulated gauge of the often impenetrable weave of politics in the area. During the time of the state elections in April 2011, the way the Gorkhaland was fused with the GJM across public space was, as mentioned, striking. Most visual representations would, in one way or another, bring together the green-yellow-white colours of the GJM flag with the Gorkhaland inscription (see illustrations below). In line with this the whole setup

<sup>150</sup> In her book on Syria, Lisa Wedeen describes the ‘Asad cult’ as “a strategy of domination based on compliance rather than legitimacy” – a compliance brought about largely through the visual orchestration of symbols and visceral orchestration of public rituals in a grand ‘spectacle’ (Wedeen, 1999, p. 6). Wedeen argues that spectacles are effective: 1) because they discipline participants in a way that “both symbolizes and prepares for political obedience”; 2) because they “dramatize (...) power by providing occasions to enforce obedience, thereby creating a politics of pretence in which all participate by few actually believe”; and finally because they “ground political thinking in the images and symbols the regime puts forth, framing the way people see themselves as citizens, much as advertising offers people a frame in which they imagine themselves as consumers” (Wedeen, 1999, p. 19).

was much more geared towards stating *who* was in control of the area, rather than *what* kind of a place Gorkhaland was (supposed to be).



Illustration 14: One of the many Gorkhaland signs

In spite of GJM's visual presence, anxiety of control still hung in the air of Darjeeling town in April-May 2011. Counter-intuitively, Subash Ghisingh was again at the centre of attention. Since GJM had barred him from entering the hills in February 2008, Ghisingh had stayed in the plains of Siliguri. However, on 8 April 2011 he returned in preparation for the elections.<sup>151</sup> In Darjeeling, his presence was closely and nervously surveyed by the media and residents. Numerous newspaper articles and a lot of general gossip in town was strikingly focused on the physical presence and position of Ghisingh in Darjeeling town. Politics and urban space seemed curiously aligned. The day before the election results were announced, Bimal Gurung

<sup>151</sup> The votes for the elections were cast in different phases throughout the state creating a temporal gap between the actual voting practice in the Darjeeling hills (part of one of the early phases of the election process) and the publication of the results on 13 May, 2011.

used a newspaper interview to emphasise that Ghisingh “should realise that the hills are not with him and he should leave” – that his “visa to the hill” would expire after the elections (Chhetri, 2011b). The threat of repercussions was only slightly veiled. As Gurung had stated in an earlier interview: “the common people would not allow him to stay even a single day in the hills. The security would definitely be relaxed after the electoral process is completed. Then we would see.” (Gurung interviews in Bagchi, 2012, p. 362).

On 13 May 2011 the election results were announced. GJM candidates had won all three hill constituencies of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong with large margins. Five days later, Rabin Rai, a young GJM cadre who had been injured during a clash with the GNLF after the elections results, died in a hospital in Siliguri. By then, Ghisingh had left the Darjeeling hills leading the newspapers to carry the breaking news: “Ghisingh leaves the hills at night” (Chhetri, 2011a). For some, there seemed to be a sigh of relief. Nonetheless, during the elections rallies the following days, a sense of urgency about dispelling Ghisingh's ghost from the hills continued to characterise the public spectacle.

In the GJM victory rally on 13 May, when the elections results were made public, GJM cadres poured into Darjeeling from the surrounding areas on foot and in a variety of vehicles (see illustration below). The slogans they chanted were, however, not about electoral victory and Gorkhaland. The most popular seemed to be “Subbash Ghisingh is rotten!” and “Subbash Ghisingh should be thrown into the dam!”. The old master had to go. Pouring into town, the cadres passed in front of the Old Supermarket building where most of the ‘ethnic’ organisations have their offices. While these must have been busy

during the “all time high” of ethnic politics in the mid-2000s (Middleton, 2010, p. 310) activities were now in a lull. As one representative told me, they were currently in “hibernation”. Wanting to display an undivided Gorkhaland, the political parties had “their hands on their heads”.<sup>152</sup> The ‘ethnic’ organisations largely followed suit as the GJM chanted slogans against the sixth schedule and hence a ‘tribal’ status for Darjeeling.



Illustration 15: GJM cadres coming into Darjeeling

On 19 May, the GJM held a “black rally” to mourn the loss of Rabin Rai. This replaced an electoral victory rally that had been planned. Here, even though Ghisingh had left the hills, the speeches again centred on his person and a rejection of the sixth schedule. Roshan Giri, GJM vice-president, stated that:

<sup>152</sup> Middleton further states that many of the ‘ethnic’ representatives and activist that were informants during his fieldwork a few years earlier were nowhere to be found (Christoffer Townsend Middleton, personal communication, Darjeeling May 2011).

The GNLF has always been creating violence here, (...) [Subbash Ghisingh] has killed more than 1200 people, he has burned down the houses of many people, many became orphans and still today GNLF is doing politics of violence and intimidation here. (...) Now if Subbash Ghisingh tries to come to the hills the people should not tolerate him. Now Subbash Ghisingh is living as a culprit of the Gorkha *jati*. (...) he escaped from Darjeeling over-night since he lost the election and the people rejected the sixth schedule.<sup>153</sup>

Although the GJM had just come out with a massive electoral victory and managed to physically dispel their old opponent from the hills, Ghisingh’s ghost was – it seemed – still around. While one might have expected speeches describing the noble cause of Gorkhaland for which Rai had, tragically, lost his life, an anxious focus on dispelling Ghisingh’s ghost and manifesting control of the hills once again overshadowed other concerns.

### Conclusion: Converging Gazes

On March 1, 2012 the new Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Bannerjee, visited the Darjeeling hills. The following day The Calcutta Telegraph reported:

At 9th Mile, before Teesta Bazar, Mamata asked the driver to stop. Stepping out of the vehicle, she started taking pictures on her iPad. “Why don’t you build cottages here? This is such a beautiful place. Many people can come and stay here,” Mamata told the tourism secretary. “I have taken some pictures. I will send them to you. Please see what can be done here,” she said before taking her seat in the front beside the driver. (Ganguly, 2012)

<sup>153</sup> Roshan Giri’s speech presented at Chowk Bazaar, Darjeeling 19 May 2011. Recorded by the author, transcribed and translated from the original Nepali with help from Narayan Adhikari.

This spontaneous event was, the Telegraph suggested, part of Mamata's "master plan to convert the hills into Switzerland". Eight months later, the Telegraph reported that the small village Mamata had photographed had become an "eco-tourist spot" with "home stays", "tourist tents" a "trekking trail" and a park (Chhetri, 2012). Between their respective electoral successes in the 2011 state elections and these instances in 2012, the GJM and Bannerjee had signed an agreement paving the way for a revised administrative setup for local government – the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). At the signing of the GTA agreement in the summer of 2011, Bannerjee, similarly stated her goal of turning Darjeeling hills into "Switzerland". Since then, this image has repeatedly been brought up both by her and the GJM.

Across disagreements, the new rulers in both Calcutta and Darjeeling thus seem to be converging on an image of a future Darjeeling. As analysed above, already the 2009 *Why Gorkhaland?* pamphlet and other GJM documents relied on a hill station image of Darjeeling – converging towards the mixed governmental and tourist gaze that the West Bengal government is applying. This converging gaze once again replays a representation of Darjeeling in the image of the hill station. Recently, a tourism development project "destination Darjeeling" was recently set in motion to further mould Darjeeling in the "Switzerland" image of a modern agro-tourism hill station. As part of the project, the government plans to renovate the Planter's Club, the Gymkhana Club and the old church of Darjeeling – all three physical manifestations of Darjeeling's hill station history (India Today Online, 2011).

Hence, as the GJM spectacles and discourse of slightly veiled threats is setting Bimal Gurung up as the local sovereign of the

Darjeeling hills, a representational agreement seems to be emerging between him and Calcutta. The once again repeated imagination of Darjeeling through the governmental gaze of the British colonisers, thus supports a governmental arrangement that itself seems close to an imperial government at a distance. In the GTA elections, the GJM won all forty-five constituencies. In twenty-eight of these they were unopposed. In a range of other constituencies they were officially opposed by Mamata's Trinamool Congress (TMC) but she had already announced that her candidates were to withdraw – albeit too late for the official deadline (Dutta, 2012). Hence, the GJM face actual competition in only one constituency. Here the independent candidate Sanchabir Subba contested, despite Bimal Gurung's public request that he stepped down (B. Roy, 2012). Subba lost the election. Furthermore, a range of potential court cases against GJM cadres, including the one related the killing of Madam Tamang, has so far gone nowhere. Hence, if we regard sovereignty as, ultimately, the power to decide over life and death then the GJM does seem to act – and be allowed to act – as a local sovereign.

Mamata's gesture presented above, on the other hand, seems to replay that of an emperor governing at a distance. Just like when the British first arrived to Darjeeling, Mamata also found a "forested spur" that could be domesticated into the contemporary tourist version of a hill station. While it remains to be seen what the GTA/GJM administration will mean for the people of Darjeeling, the arrangement of local autonomy that has been instituted seems to differ substantially from what might have been aspired for.



## Chapter 9: Conclusion

*Processes of globalization have disturbed the familiar metaphors and practices of vertical encompassment (still taken for granted by the participants in debates on globalization, including journalists and academics), and the new landscape that is emerging can be understood only through a rethinking of space and scale (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002, p. 990)*

The world as we know it from the school atlas is changing. Over the last couple of decades, we have been searching for terms to grasp this change. Globalisation, neoliberalism, and empire have been some of the suggestions. However, what has been important to me, in the present study, has not been a discussion of what overall terms we should apply to grasp contemporary changes. Rather, my interest has been attached to the ways in which these changes are actually taking place, how the changing world involves shifting conditions for government and for local autonomy. I have engaged this investigation from the Himalayan hills, not to exoticise this location, but due to the perspective on government that this locality allows. As argued in the text above, these hills are inherently challenging to govern and they have historically been regarded as a place of un-governability. On the other hand, they have also functioned as a place of refuge from the centralised governmental gaze. Investigating the conditions of government and autonomy from these hills thus allows us to bring into sharp relief the spatiality of government. And it is, I argue, exactly the spatiality of government that we need to rethink in light of contemporary changes.

Pursuing this interest, I have engaged in a complex and broad-sweeping analysis. Arguing that we need to regard contemporary

changes in light of the governmental histories that they relate to, I have presented three governmental assemblages: imperial landscapes, national territories and glocal place-making. I have analysed how each of these emerged in relation the extension of government across the Himalayan hills at different points in time. Nonetheless, I have done so primarily to provide a deeper understanding of the contemporary conditions. In the study, I thus show how elements of both imperial landscapes and national territories are present in contemporary government; I argue that these elements stand in various positions of tension with each other; and I illustrate how a range of these tensions are actualised in place-making in the Himalayan hills. Hence, while claims to local autonomy are obviously framed by categories of difference originating in imperial histories and national territories, the politics surrounding these claims in turn tell us a whole lot about the contemporary life empire and nation.

As my study illustrates, the imperial landscapes of the British and Gorkhas have operated through an ecological differentiation between hills and plains, and through anthropological differentiations of castes and races. The national territories of Nepal and India have, in turn, sought to 'rule out and roll over' these differences in the production of national unity. I argue, however, that the production of national territories has 'rolled over' more than it has 'ruled out' the imperial landscapes and their lines of difference. In Panchayat Nepal, this rolling over involved teaching a new national language of difference – one in which notions of developmental difference would eliminate imperial hierarchies of caste. But, as I illustrate in the study, imperial differences survived below the surface. National schooling ended up extending imperial differences across the hills more efficiently than

ever, while the practice of schooling concomitantly supported a developmental differentiation between educated and un-educated, awareness and backwardness.

Hence, imperial landscapes and national territories are not so interesting by themselves as they are interesting in light of the tensions that exist between them. We routinely regard empire as operating through gradually fading extensions of power from centres towards peripheries, through spatial differentiation and through organised ranks of inequality (Ludden, 2011). National rule is, on the other hand, typically imagined in terms of spatial homogeneity, even extensions of sovereignty and at least some level of equality. National territories, in other words, encourages us to disregard the spatiality of government, while imperial landscapes brings this spatiality in focus. My study, however, blurs the boundaries between these two assemblages in real life. In my analysis of the position of Darjeeling within the territorial reorganisation and national imagination of India, I show how colonial lines of ecological and racial distinctions directly inform national territorialisation. Hence, while Indian nationalism often emphasises its background in a 'post-colonial condition', it is important to remember that this conditions wasn't nearly as uniform as national discourse tends to portray. And it is important to note that the spatial inequalities of the imperial landscape were often brought into the national territory across midnight in 1947.<sup>154</sup>

The contemporary production of place, I have argued, exposes a range of the tensions that exist between imperial landscapes and

<sup>154</sup> See (Ludden, 2012) for a thought-provoking analysis of the contemporary life of imperial borders and its consequences. See also (S. Roy, 2007) for a detailed analysis of Nehruvian India including many lines that run back across the midnight of 1947.

national territories. As movements for local autonomy seek to pose their localities as places to be invested with formal governmental authority, they bring out, refashion and re-combine categories of difference from both imperial landscapes and national territories. Concomitantly, the politics of autonomy also actualises globalised notions of indigeneity, tourism, heritage and branding. The governmental assemblage around glocal place-making, thus, brings out elements that we associate with all three of the grand terms for contemporary change mentioned above: globalisation, neoliberalism, and empire. It brings out the contemporary global connectivity in multiple ways and on both sides of traditional distinctions between e.g. state dominance and grass-root resistance. As my study of the Limbuwan movement illustrates, the production of place and claims to local autonomy operate through connections of imperial differences to global notions of indigeneity and the circulation of local as well as international academic texts. Affluent diaspora, furthermore, play a role in this both through the production of academic studies based in foreign universities, and through the wider circulation of academic knowledge of indigenous history and culture across social media. The production of Limbuwan as a 'local' place is thus 'global' in multiple senses.

The same goes for Darjeeling and Gorkhaland. Here, connections between state interest and globalised capitalist endeavours that one could describe in terms of neoliberalism support a colonial image of Darjeeling. Hence, in the governmental assemblage around glocal place-making, the movement for a Gorkhaland state is faced not only with national territorial government, but also with globalised images of Darjeeling that are circulated in relation to industries of heritage, tourism and tea. As I have shown, these images replay colonial

aesthetics that might end up as a gathering point for new forms of imperial government at a distance. The convergence between the West Bengal government and the GJM around the existing harmonious image of the hill station, point towards what might be seen as a contemporary marker of normality (as opposed to violence and unruliness). Here, the end of conflict is marked in the commercialised image of tourists pouring into the hills. International tourism thus comes to encapsulate the notion of the area's "return to peace" and its division from areas characterised by more perpetual unruliness in the national and global imagination.

Taking a concerted look at the contemporary conditions for autonomy across Limbuwan and Gorkhaland, the picture that emerges is ambivalent. Across these movements my study suggest that the contemporary changes in governmental assemblages might bring decisions both closer to and further from the people inhabiting these areas. For the Limbuwan movement, connections to globalised notions of indigeneity bring substantial leverage into claims for a federal state. The shifting governmental situation thus brings opportunities that have not been present across long periods of autocratic and unequal rule. However, as my study also indicates, the academic politics through which the battle for Limbuwan is currently fought also contains a potentially exclusive dimension. As engagement in this sort of politics relies on an 'ethnic fluency' operating through a specific language of difference and belonging, the academic politics of Limbuwan in part replays developmental difference of awareness and un-educated backwardness. As a range of the novel 'indigenous people's organisations' double as NGOs implementing foreign supported development programs, the tried and tested developmental language of

awareness easily imposes itself in the vocabulary of their operations. The consequences of this might be a repeated distinction between developed centres and backward peripheries – whether in geographical or other sense.

Finally, despite a multitude of connections that challenge our scalar imagination of the world, my study illustrates how the Limbuwan and Gorkhaland movements for autonomy are still thoroughly territorialised by the national scale. Throughout my investigations of the movements, I kept asking myself: Why are there not more secessionists? The contiguous areas of Limbuwan and Gorkhaland, after all, share histories of migration, settlement and centralised exploitation; they share normative landscape of belonging; and they share contemporary ambitions. Nonetheless, the movements I analysed largely turn their backs to each other, while turning their fronts towards the national centres. As the longer history of the area reminds us, this movement into rather than away from the governmental gaze of the nation-state is something that has gradually emerged. It obviously involves a paradox as local autonomy is sought through centralised legibility. This paradox, I think, illustrates part of the reason for the resilience of national territorialisation even in the contemporary period of global changes: that even a supposedly 'fragile' national state like Nepal has managed to direct the energies of local aspirations towards its territorial centre – turning the back to the potential soul-mates across the border.

### **Studying Contemporary Government and Politics**

If the scales that we habitually rely on for analysis of government and politics are shifting what sort of analytical language can we then invoke? As pointed out above, my study clearly shows a range of

political and governmental dynamics that cut across, rearrange, and render obsolete a school atlas approach to the study of contemporary government and politics. However, I also suggest new conceptual possibilities. First of all, I have invoked the notions of landscape with its associations of textures and elevation. In the course of this study, the rugged landscape of the hills has acted as a constant reminder that government, no matter how globalised, is extended across geography – and that geography differs. It has, similarly, reminded us that government fundamentally operates through a combination of vision and materiality. Landscape, thus, brings out the spatial variety of government and governmental conditions that a reliance of territory obscures. Together with notions of borderland, landscape reminds us of the differences within as well as the similarities across national territories. As such, the notion of landscape provides a different potential starting-point for analysis than territory – one that brings into sharper view the spatiality of government.

Secondly, I have employed the notion of assemblages to grasp the historical shifts in government that I analyse. I follow Deleuze and Guattari in seeing the assemblage as a combination of discourses and practices that organise space in certain ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 503-505). Within this overall characteristic, the notion of the assemblage indicates a coming together of a broad range of different elements. As in the British hill station, an assemblage can combine a broad range of interests, agendas and sensibilities: scientific, commercial, administrative, aesthetic, recreational etc. The imperial landscapes, national territories and glocal place-making that I have analysed in this study also combine knowledge and vision in various ways. Invoking the notions of the assemblage as an approach to

contemporary government is useful because it sidesteps habitual notions of scale. Although assemblages organise space and thus produce scale, they are not conceptually tied to certain scales. As I have employed the term, it has thus been related to the scales of empire, nation, and place in their continued scalar fixation and shifting moments of territorialisation and de-territorialisation. Hence, the assemblage opens up useful perspectives on a world undergoing scalar rearrangements.

Thirdly, my study has relied on an analytic that focuses on difference. In this perspective, government operates through and creates a variety of languages of differences as a way to make an unwieldy and complex reality governable. In my study, I have pointed out how ecological, territorial and anthropological languages of difference operate through different categories and in different combinations across the three assemblages. This is not meant to indicate that these are the only possible languages of difference, nor that the assemblages present their only possibilities for combination. As my study shows, shifts in governmental assemblages emerge through a continuous play of differences. Over time, some differences are emphasised and others obscured. And, as I show, differences produced or emphasised in order to govern often attain a social life in which they are later mobilised and refashioned to challenge and rearrange government. Hence, the languages of difference and assemblages that I bring out in the present study essentially come out of my analytical engagement with the Himalayan hills. However, these notions of differences and assemblages potentially have a broader resonance because they obviously tap into globalised orders – such as the national order of things and global notions of indigenous belonging.

Finally, my study has first and foremost dealt with ‘government’. But what does it tell us conceptually about government? Obviously, my approach to government relies substantially on conceptual developments surrounding the Foucaultian notion of ‘governmentality’. However, this notion often overlooks or even obscures the spatiality of government in its focus on the government of populations.<sup>155</sup> As the long historical lines of my study has illustrated, government is always also a government of landscape. This is important because it is a feature of governmental practice that the national territorial assemblages obscures. Through governmental discourses and practices this assemblages present the school atlas imagination of space as external to government, although, I argue, it is in fact an essentially building block in the production of governability and government. Hence, in this study, I have stubbornly insisted to use the simple term government across various assemblages to indicate that there is no other, essentially different government out there. This recognition becomes even more acute as the national scale might no longer be the natural scale to think through.

#### **Paths ahead**

The present study opens up various interesting paths for further investigation in the intersection between globalised dynamics of local political aspirations. One pressing problematic to engage is the contemporary political play around notions of ‘ruly’ and ‘un-ruly’ places. My study tentatively point out that there might be a new ‘normal’ emerging for such areas associated with branding, tourism

<sup>155</sup> As Stuart Elden has recently pointed out in relation to ‘territory’: while Foucault’s approach to history is “extremely helpful” his treatment of territory “is, at best, misleading” – the problem being that “Territory emerges later than Foucault thinks it disappears.” (Elden, 2013, pp. 2,8)

and the global competition among nation-states. In the Darjeeling hills, the image of tourist coming in to enjoy the views, the agri-tourist accommodation and the heritage sites seems to become the very illustration of a ‘return to peace’. As the recent opening of a ‘guerrilla trek’ where tourists can follow the trails of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal illustrates, the same tendency goes for other ‘unruly’ areas on the subcontinent.<sup>156</sup> But what are we to make of such ‘returns to peace’? How do these commercialised dynamics contain the ‘unruliness’ and how do they relate to the aspirations behind it?

As I argue for Darjeeling, a ‘return to peace’ might involve new arrangements for governing at distance that neither bring decisions closer to the local inhabitants, nor resonate very well with the democratic image that most states eagerly project in the contemporary world of international competition. Reflections in this direction lead to another pressing problematic around the local democratic consequences of the contemporary global shifts. It has been outside the scope of the present study to engage this problematic. However, my motivation throughout has been connected to the aspirations for a larger say in local matters that I believe, ultimately, fuels the complex and contradictory politics of local autonomy. Such aspirations are obviously intimately related to notions of democracy. Hence, as the conditions for a politics based on these aspirations are shifting, so should our approach to them in terms of democracy. As I suggest, new concerns might be arising along with the novel opportunities.

<sup>156</sup> The trek was opened by the former guerrilla leader, Maoist party supremo, and former prime minister Prachanda in October 2012. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19815779> (accessed January 2013)

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